# Prester John: the Legend and Its Sources

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# Prester John: The Legend and its Sources

Compiled and translated by

Keagan Brewer

Crusade Texts in Translation 27

ROUTLEDGE

# CRUSADE TEXTS IN TRANSLATION

Volume 27

*About the volume*

The story of the mysterious oriental leader Prester John, who ruled a land teeming with marvels and might come to the aid of Christians in the levant, held an intense grip on the medieval mind. It has received much scholarly attention, but never before have the sources been collected and coherently presented to readers. This book now brings together a fully-representative set of sources from which we get our knowledge of the legend. These texts, spanning from the Crusades to the enlightenment, are presented in their original languages and in English translation.

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The crusading movement, which originated in the eleventh century and lasted beyond the sixteenth, bequeathed to its future historians a legacy of sources which are unrivalled in their range and variety. These sources document in fascinating detail the motivations and viewpoints, military efforts and spiritual lives of the participants in the crusades. They also narrate the internal histories of the states and societies which crusaders established or supported in the many regions where they fought, as well as those of their opponents. Some of these sources have been translated in the past but the vast majority have been available only in their original language. The goal of this series is to provide a wide ranging corpus of texts, most of them translated for the first time, which will illuminate the history of the Crusades and the Crusader States from every angle, including that of their principal adversaries, the Muslim powers of the Middle east.

*About the translators*

**Keagan Brewer** is affiliated with the Centre for Medieval Studies at the University of Sydney, Australia.

The Legendary Prester John, c. 1599. Engraving, 20.3 × 15.7 cm (8 × 6 3/16 in.), by Luca Ciamberlano after Agostino Carracci, after Karel van Mander. Courtesy of Harvard Art Museums/Fogg Museum, Alpheus Hyatt Purchasing Fund, S1.44.2.

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# PRESTER JOHN: THE LEGEND AND ITS SOURCES

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# Prester John: The Legend and its Sources

*Compiled and translated by*

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# Foreword

The aim of this book is to collate and present the major sources for the study of the legend of Prester John. For the medieval texts, these are supplied in both the original language (usually Latin) and English translation. Because they are less material to the usual discussions of Prester John, the modern texts are presented only in English. Most of the translations here are my own; two have been reprinted with permission from their copyright holders (specifically Francisco Álvares and Remedius Prutky). Although much of the material presented here has been known in the field of Prester John studies for some time, nearly all of it has only been available to those who have knowledge of various foreign languages, including Latin, German, French, and Portuguese. The primary aim has therefore been to make this material accessible, and to supplement the standard Prester John texts with less well-known material, especially from the early modern era, so we can better understand not only the legend's genesis and development, but also its later evolutions and slow demise.

In many ways this work is the result of labours done not only by myself, and one must always recognise when one is standing on the shoulders of giants. The main writer to whom all those who study Prester John must pay their dues is late nineteenth-century German scholar Friedrich Zarncke. Although Zarncke himself profited from his predecessors, he is generally considered to be the founder of the academic study of Prester John, and much of the material presented here was brought to light through his thorough and ground-breaking work on the sources. Despite the fact that his writings are now almost a hundred and fifty years old, a great deal of his opinions and editorial work remain surprisingly current, and much of what has been written by authors of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries has simply been echoing his opinions, for better or for worse.

This book is divided as follows. The introduction consists of a discussion of the thorny but important question of belief in the legend, incorporating a general outline of the history of the idea of Prester John and its mutations. Following this are the sources presented in rough chronological order, divided into thematic sections for

convenience. Each section is introduced with contextual information to assist the reader, and likewise each text is individually introduced to provide its context. Three appendices are attached. The first is an annotated source list, including the bibliographical details for editions, translations and/or manuscripts for the sources presented in this book, and reference to other sources that have not been included here. The second appendix outlines the complex manuscript traditions of the most popular and important of the texts dealing with Prester John, the *Prester John Letter,* including a list of the 234 known Latin manuscripts, and descriptions of the vernacular traditions. The third appendix is a short description of Prester John and his place in historical maps. This is followed by abbreviations, bibliography and index.

A great many people deserve thanks for their help and encouragement in the preparation of this work. First and foremost to James Kane, who was of great help with tricky Latin passages and has been an incredible support throughout the whole project, and to Andrea Williams, who helped with the Old French sources. Thanks to Nicholas Fung, David Ong, Marcus Harvey and Jenny Green, for ideas and encouragement. Thanks to those who have provided permission to reproduce their work here: Noel Corbett, Tamarah Kohanski, C. David Benson, R.B.C. Huygens, Jean Richard, and the editors of the Hakluyt series. To all previous scholars who have done such brilliant work in the field of Prester John, each footnote and bibliographical reference should be taken as a thank you as well as a roadmap to further knowledge. To the staff at the University of Sydney's Fisher Library, for their untiring effort in locating and obtaining the many obscure works which I have had to use, and to the staff of those other libraries who have been generous enough to lend them to me. Thanks to John Smedley and the team at Ashgate, who were enthusiastic, supportive, and patient throughout the project. Thanks also to Bernard Hamilton who was pivotal in the final stages of preparing the book for publication. And finally, thanks to my friends and family, for their support and love.

K.J.B.

*November, 2014*

Introduction

# Believing in Prester John

William of Newburgh was a *proper* historian. He wrote his history of the English people at the close of the twelfth century, following in the footsteps of his great predecessor, the Venerable Bede. William greatly admired Bede, 'whose wisdom and integrity it is sacrilegious to doubt'.[1] The man was to be respected for his historicity and his balanced representations of the truth of the British past.

But there was another relatively new school of British 'history', headed by writers like Geoffrey of Monmouth, which created a false genealogy of kings through the line of a certain King Arthur. These histories were to be abhorred for their obvious falsehoods, according to William. It was a historian's duty, William said, to prevent the spread of such fallacious nonsense being propagated by the likes of Geoffrey, a man who had an 'uncontrolled passion for lying'.[2] Geoffrey's methodology was also suspect, for in writing his history, all he was doing was taking up the 'infantile stories' of British folklore, 'adding to them considerably from his own imagination' and 'cloaking them with the honourable title of history by embellishing them in the Latin tongue'.[3]

At the end of his lengthy refutation of Geoffrey and his new school of Arthurian 'history', William poses the following question: 'Is he dreaming of another world containing infinite kingdoms in which those things which he recounted earlier actually happened?'[4] This is a question that must also be asked of the Prester John legend. The figure of Prester John, a Christian priest and king who ruled over a marvellous oriental empire, held a firm grip on the Middle Ages, just like the legend of King Arthur. The *Prester John Letter*, written by a European adopting the persona of Prester John, is one of the most remarkable pieces of medieval literature, describing in detail Prester John's incredible kingdom, which was said to be full of hybrid monsters and marvels like the fountain of youth. But how was this letter received? Did its medieval audiences believe Prester John and his kingdom of marvels were geographically tangible? Or were they 'dreaming of another world'? And if they did believe Prester John to

be real, what exactly did they believe? And why?

This 'reception history' approach has been largely ignored in Prester John studies.[5] The vast majority of work on Prester John has thus far centred upon historical points of view such as the origins of the legend, textual points of view such as the transmission of the *Letter* and literary points of view regarding certain aspects of Prester John's kingdom, particularly its representation as a utopia.[6] While it is important not to understate the importance of these issues, ignoring the reception of the idea of Prester John is to the detriment of our modern understanding of this distinctly medieval idea. This introduction shall attempt to make the first steps towards filling this gap, while at the same time providing a brief history of the Prester John legend.

I argue that belief in Prester John as a real geopolitical figure was pervasive, although this does not necessarily imply that Prester John was necessarily believed to be as he was presented in the famous *Letter*. Many were sceptical about the fantasies told about him, but there exists no piece of evidence prior to the eighteenth century that argued that Prester John never existed in some form or another either in the past or in a distant yet-to-be-discovered land.[7] By the thirteenth century, believing in the legend was made easier by the important shift in the meaning of the term 'Prester John' from the name of a single man to the title for a line of kings, a vague description for any great Christian ruler who was uncovered as a result of European exploration. Even for those who had not read the *Letter*, Prester John became the means through which Europeans came to understand that there were Christians beyond the European purview, in the steppes of Central Asia, in Ethiopia, India, China, Persia, Syria, or elsewhere. One could very well doubt the tall tales told of Prester John in documents like the *Letter* but still believe in Prester John as an embodiment of these very real communities of foreign Christians.

The legend was born out of the historical impetus of real events occurring in the Far East, a distant world that had had little impact on the European consciousness since the invasions of the Huns in the fourth and fifth centuries. The Prester John legend later underwent transformation, adapting itself to new events taking place in the Far East, most notably the Mongol conquests of the thirteenth century and the exploration of Asia and Africa in the later Middle Ages. Contrary to expectation, these did little to discourage belief in Prester John. The world-shaking movements of the Mongols, an oriental people at war with various Muslim groups and who had a reputation for tolerance of religious plurality, only seemed to prove that Prester John, a Christian ruler who was apparently coming to the aid of the crusaders in the Holy Land, actually existed. Likewise, when

adventurers and explorers journeyed through Africa in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, their pre-existing belief in Prester John was applied to their observations. So, when an explorer uncovered a tribal leader in Africa, the leader's outward appearance might have led European explorers to think of Prester John, specifically if he was opulent, powerful and/or Christian. One such explorer identified a non-Christian tribal leader in Africa as Prester John because the royal insignia he used involved a cross-like decorative motif.[8] In this way, the tiniest modicum of evidence became proof for an explorer's pre-existing belief in Prester John, and so the legend continued in strength despite increased exploration of Asia and Africa.

Equally, after the Mongol conquests had opened up Asia to European missionaries in the thirteenth century, Prester John appeared everywhere as an embodiment of various Christian groups. Many of these people who were associated with him were in fact adherents to other religions such as Buddhism, but the archetypal medieval worldview, characterised by the eternal struggle between Christian and Saracen (i.e. Muslim), did not normally entertain the possibility that other organised religions existed, except of course the Jews, with whom medieval Christians had a long and uneasy relationship.[9] Because the legend of Prester John was an embodiment of these outside communities, it was accurate at the fundamental level. There really were great unknown kingdoms beyond the scope of the medieval European, and the figure of Prester John, despite the myth that built up around him, was based on a historical person.

The *Letter*'s fantastic representation of Prester John's kingdom was the continuation of a vast tradition of scholarly representations of the Orient, so much so that in many ways it was simply a new medium for old ideas. In other words, to medieval readers the *Letter* was a confirmation of what was already known, rather than a radical paradigm shift. The monsters and marvels of India were factually demonstrable to anyone who consulted the history books, maps, and encyclopaedias that medieval men trusted. It was a widely documented truth that the Orient was a land of marvels and this remained the belief for the most part until the exploration of Asia gradually made it untenable. In depicting Prester John's eastern kingdom as a land of marvels, the *Prester John Letter* was therefore not a controversial departure from received ideas about the East, but a confirmation of them, and thus easy to adopt as a new feature of the medieval worldview when it was first circulated in the 1160s or 70s.

The Prester John legend was also founded upon the same methodological framework that had underpinned medieval knowledge of the East for centuries. Other texts written in the twelfth century attest that medieval people based their knowledge of the Orient on

travellers' tales and on the written authority of works such as the mythological compendium of Solinus and the fictional descriptions of Alexander the Great's journeys to the East.[10] The fanciful stories told by such texts were unverifiable to the medieval European, so they were often repeated and came to be perceived as fact, although there were of course many who wondered about the East's marvellous reputation, or were openly dissatisfied with the authority of such texts, disbelieving them but nevertheless using them for their entertainment value or for moral didacticism.[11] At a time when proper exploration of Asia was impossible, such texts filled in the gap in medieval knowledge of the Far East. It should therefore come as little surprise that these texts also had an important influence on the *Prester John Letter*'s representation of the East. Logically, if one were to question the Prester John legend, then one would equally have to question much more that was written about the Orient.

Prester John was a convenient way for medieval Europeans to interpret a world they could not understand, and the popularity of the legend suggests it had a wide appeal and a powerful influence on medieval perceptions of the great oriental Unknown. Prester John formed part of a larger interest in the East which had been entertained since classical times by men like Herodotus, and which held a powerful sway on the mentality that ushered in the era of exploration. He was thus part of an orientalist curiosity that has had a tremendous influence on the history of our world.

## The Origins of the Legend

Before the Prester John legend began *per se*, a story was in circulation about a man by the name of Patriarch John who had journeyed from India to Rome in 1122. According to the story, John had left his Indian homeland because of the death of his predecessor. He journeyed to Byzantium to attend a ceremony recognising his appointment as Patriarch of the Indies, and was discovered there by legates of the Pope who were engaged in negotiations with the Byzantine emperor. When the papal legates met John, they told him about the magnificence of Rome, and managed to convince him to continue his journey there. When he finally arrived in Rome, the residents of the city, clergy and lay alike, were amazed to see a foreigner from such a distant land, and they pressed him with questions about his homeland. In the presence of Pope Calixtus II (r.1119–24), John described India as a land of marvels and miracles. Hulna, its capital city, had the largest walls in the world, so he said. No one lived there but the most faithful Christians; all non-Christian

men who entered were either converted or died instantly. One of the rivers of paradise flowed through the city's centre, depositing gold and gemstones by which the people were made extremely rich. A church outside the city housed the body of St Thomas, the apostle who evangelised India according to Christian tradition. Every year, the red-haired body of Thomas awoke to bestow blessings upon the faithful. At the end of Patriarch John's speech, the Pope and the others who were there raised their hands to the sky and praised God for the miracles which He continued to work in India.

This is the story as told in an anonymous text known as the *De Adventu Patriarchae Indorum* ('On the Arrival of the Patriarch of the Indians'), which was brought to light by Friedrich Zarncke in 1879, and which makes up the first text in this book.[12] Zarncke made his edition of the text from nine manuscripts, one printing, one fragment, and from the versions of it inserted into two chronicles.[13] The popularity of the text is reiterated by the recent discovery of a further nine manuscripts, five of which were noted by Wilhelm Baum, and four which are noted here for the first time.[14] An examination of these new manuscripts may elucidate some more information about the text, such as the dating or the authorship, both of which are impossible to determine from internal evidence alone.

Most people would disregard the story told in the *De Adventu* as legendary nonsense were it not for the existence of another completely independent text that corroborates the visit of this John to Rome.[15] This second text is a letter written by Odo of Rheims, a man who was apparently present in Rome when the mysterious John made his visit: 'I was in attendance in the present year, namely on the sixth day of the week after the observance of the Lord's ascension, in the presence of the lord pope'.[16] The accounts of the *De Adventu* and the letter of Odo are similar in essence but differ in many specifics. In Odo's letter, for example, John is not called a patriarch (*patriarcha*), but an archbishop (*archiepiscopus*). Odo also gave a completely different catalyst for John's journey. John did not begin his journey because his predecessor had died, as the *De Adventu* put it, but because the leader of India had recently died without an heir, and the Indians sought a Byzantine prince to fill the vacancy. After several princes died returning to India, the Byzantine emperor refused to send another, and so John continued his journey to Rome to try to find one there. In Rome, John proceeded with the fabulous speech about his Indian homeland and the miracles of St Thomas. When he had finished, the Pope expressed doubts about the authenticity of the account, but John swore an oath on the Gospel that it was true, and finally the Pope believed.

Because the two texts differ in many details, and because they use

very different vocabulary to discuss the same 'events', it is clear that they are not textually related. Following Ockham's Razor, the simplest explanation is that there is a kernel of historical fact underneath the legendary veneer. It seems likely that someone did travel to Rome, but probably not from what we today would call 'India'. This impostor was certainly a Christian, since he was well-versed in the standard St Thomas legends. Vsevolod Slessarev has argued speculatively, but convincingly, that John was a native of the city of Edessa, a city steeped in St Thomas lore.[17] If this were the case, it would be neither the first nor the last time that an imposter traveller had told strange tales of foreign lands which were accepted by the people who heard them.[18] The story about John was repeated in chronicles as a factual event even as late as the end of the fifteenth century.[19]

Two decades later, when Europeans heard rumours of a great battle between a powerful Islamic leader and his unknown foe in the Far East, they would cast their minds back to John and his marvellous Indian homeland. Although in reality the Islamic leader's enemy was a Buddhist Khitan warrior from the Central Asian steppe, the residents of the Crusader States who first heard tell of the battle assumed that he was a Christian who possessed the same pious desire to expunge the Muslim infidel that they did. The spread of this rumour provided the occasion for the first written record of John, no longer as a patriarch or archbishop, but a priest-king in his own right, and under the name by which he was to be remembered for centuries to come: *Presbiter Johannes*, Prester John.

The first written record of Prester John is found under the year 1145 in Otto of Freising's *De Duabus Civitatibus* ('On the Two Cities'), initially penned in 1143–6 but surviving only in an 1157 reworking.[20] Otto, who was present at the meeting, briefly describes how a bishop from the Latin Crusader States, Bishop Hugh of Jabala, made a report to Pope Eugenius III (r.1145–53) about Prester John. It has long been recognised that Hugh's report, which describes battles involving Prester John and his failed advance to assist the crusaders in the Holy Land, contains elements pointing to the Battle of Qatwan which took place on 9th September 1141.[21] This battle was waged between the two major political powers of mid-twelfth century Central Asia, the Seljuk Sultan Sanjār and Yēlǘ Dàshí, the leader of the Kara-Khitai, an East Asian people who had been ejected from China and established an empire in Central Asia at the expense of the Muslim authorities.[22] The battle was so tremendous that Ibn al-Athīr later wrote that: 'In the history of Islam, there was no battle greater than this'.[23] It was especially important for Muslims because it was a crushing defeat for their forces under Sanjār, whose army apparently lost some 30,000 men.[24] The shock caused by the defeat, that one of the most powerful

leaders of the Islamic world could be overcome in battle by the nomadic, uncultured “barbarians” of the east, was such that news of the defeat spread even as far as the Crusader States and from there to Europe. Herein lies the origin of the first written record of Prester John.[25]

Several justifications can be given for associating Otto’s account with the Battle of Qatwan described above. First of all, Otto tells us the event happened ‘not many years ago’. Secondly, Prester John, who rules ‘beyond Persia and Armenia in the furthest east’, is said to have won his victory over the ‘brother kings of the Persians and Medes, called the Samiards’.[26] Some manuscripts of the work read ‘Saniardos’ for ‘Samiardos’,[27] and from there it is a small leap to Sanjar, the name of the Muslim leader defeated at Qatwan, although he appears mistakenly as a pair of brother-kings.

It is imperative to note here that even at the beginning the legend of Prester John had oral transmission at its core, and that it is impossible to retrace the spread of the legend in its early days using only the scanty evidence which has come down to us in written reports like that of Otto of Freising. Indeed, a careful analysis of the phrasing employed by Otto reveals that Prester John was already a commonly discussed persona by the time Otto penned his account. When the name Prester John is introduced by Otto, it is followed by the subordinate clause ‘as indeed they are accustomed to call him’, indicating that the name already held some currency. Moreover, towards the end of Otto’s passage on Prester John, one encounters the phrase ‘but they allege …’. Grammatically, the subject of this cannot be Otto’s informant, the Bishop Hugh of Jabala, and must rather be the ubiquitous ‘they’, another indication that Prester John was being widely discussed at the time Otto was writing.

From the very start, we can see that the legend was regarded with suspicion. By returning to his main subject with the scathing words ‘but enough of this’, Otto treats the matter almost as though it were unworthy of being recorded. It is unclear exactly what Otto’s thoughts were, whether he saw the story as doubtful as a whole or only in part. We can be quite sure, however, that the pope, who heard the same story, took little stock of it. While Eugenius III acted on the main subject of Hugh of Jabala’s embassy, the need to retake Edessa, issuing a papal bull calling for the Second Crusade on 1 December 1145, no action was taken whatsoever to open a dialogue with Prester John.[28] In fact, no mention of Prester John survives at all from the time of Eugenius’ pontificate (1145–53), aside from Otto’s account. No pope who believed in Prester John as a veracious geopolitical entity would have passed up the opportunity to make contact with him, especially since he was apparently such a powerful ruler who desired to come to

the aid of the Christian territories in the Holy Land, which were in an increasingly precarious military position as the twelfth century wore on.

The records of the pontificate of Eugenius III are not the only place in which Prester John is curiously absent. It took 70 years for him to appear again in crusading literature, in works associated with the Fifth Crusade (1213–21).[29] He did not make an appearance in Odo of Deuil's account of the Second Crusade (1147–49), nor in any of the literature describing the Third Crusade (1189–92) or the Fourth Crusade (1202–04). He does not figure in the compendious history written by William of Tyre (c.1130–86), resident of the Latin Crusader States, a man who was perfectly placed, both physically and intellectually, to have known of the Prester John legend. And why would Gerald of Wales (c.1146–1223), a man whose writings are full of legends and marvels, record only the briefest of mentions of Prester John if not because he thought the story was likely to be untrue?[30] Prester John's curious absence from these sources is mirrored in the manuscripts of the *Prester John Letter* as well, where there is a decline in manuscript numbers around the turn of the twelfth/thirteenth century.[31] Unfortunately, since precious little is understood about the spread of the news of Prester John in the legend's early years, it is difficult to forge convincing arguments about belief and disbelief based on his absence from these early sources.

It is safe to say that the legend of Prester John would have come down to us only as a minor note in an obscure chronicle were it not for the ingenuity and daring of the author of the most important document for the study of Prester John, the *Prester John Letter*. The arrival on the scene of the extremely popular *Letter* in c.1165-70 changed the face of medieval perceptions of the Orient indelibly. The *Letter*, which purported to have been written by Prester John himself, provided a lengthy description of the lands of his kingdom and the monsters, marvels, and miracles contained therein. It subsumes elements that were clearly intended as propaganda, like the condescending comments towards Greeks, and others that express medieval European utopian desires.[32] Although it was supposed to have been addressed to Byzantine Emperor Manuel Komnenos, no Greek-language copy has ever been found, and it bears all the philological and intellectual hallmarks of a Latin forgery.[33] But what is obvious to modern historians, that it was a Latin invention, may not have been so obvious to its medieval audiences.

As we have it today, the Latin version of the *Letter* survives in at least 469 manuscripts, 234 of those in its original Latin, with roughly 30 Latin copies from the twelfth century.[34] Zarncke provided the standard Latin edition in 1879, but he knew of only 96 manuscripts

and only made use of 74 of these for his edition.[35] A recent monumental study of the *Letter* by Bettina Wagner has questioned some of Zarncke's editorial work, but for the most part his edition of the original Latin version remains valid despite the fact that the manuscript count has more than tripled since his day, and for this reason I have followed Zarncke's edition below.[36] In fact, the *Letter* very quickly took on a life of its own. Zarncke identified five interpolations which he labelled A, B, C, D, and E, each of which added various new details to the descriptions of Prester John's kingdom. After examining some 200 manuscripts, Wagner has revised the *Letter*'s textual traditions even further and has provided new editions of several variants which differ significantly from Zarncke's; these have not been presented here for reasons of space, and since these newly discovered variants generally present the same information but in different form.[37] The editorial work of Zarncke and Wagner shows that in many ways the *Prester John Letter* functioned almost as a genre of text rather than as a single piece of writing.

The standard Latin version of the *Letter* began with the usual epistolary salutations, followed by several playfully insulting remarks towards its addressee, Byzantine Emperor Manuel Komnenos (r.1143–80). In fact, Prester John was writing to Manuel 'because we wish and desire to know if you hold the right faith like us, and if you believe in our lord Jesus Christ through all things'. Prester John knew Manuel was just a man, even though the little Greeks (*graeculi*) believed that Manuel was a God.[38]

The writer then embarks upon 'an orgy of unrestrained grandiloquence', to borrow the phrase of one commentator.[39] Prester John, a devoted Christian, was the richest, most powerful and most virtuous man in the world. He was a good Christian, protecting and sustaining the poor and vowing to visit the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem with a massive army, to vanquish the enemies of Christ. Prester John himself lived in the Three Indias, where the apostle Thomas rests. To get there one goes through the desert, down the hill to Babylon, and past the Tower of Babel. His kingdom contained a variety of beasts, monsters, and other marvels, including a fountain of youth that makes anyone who drinks from it perpetually 32 years of age. It was also home to various moral idealisms. In Prester John's kingdom, there were no thieves or liars, nor any vice whatsoever.[40]

Many of these stories about Prester John's kingdom bear strong parallels with the 'Marvels of the East' traditions that informed medieval views of the Orient. Representing the East in this way was common in the Middle Ages, and these sorts of depictions were founded first of all upon a lack of proper knowledge of Asia's geography and cultures. To fill in the knowledge gap, medieval men

relied on rumour, travellers' reports, and the dubious scholarship of sources like the mythological compendium of Solinus, and the fanciful descriptions of Alexander the Great's journeys to the East. The *Prester John Letter* also borrowed heavily from these sources, and so, although it was different in some respects, the picture of the East that it engendered was by no means at odds with the thrust of preexisting attitudes, except in the figure of Prester John himself as a Christian.[41]

Dating the *Letter* is highly problematic. There are only two indications to work with, the first of which is preserved in the chronicle of Alberic de Trois-Fontaines. Alberic wrote that the *Letter* was 'sent' in 1165.[42] Given that Alberic was writing after 1232, some 70 years later, we cannot accept his date uncritically, as many have done in the past.[43] The second indication is a scribal addition to one manuscript copy of the *Letter* written in a thirteenth-century hand, which holds that it was sent 'circa annum domini M.C.LXX'.[44] Other evidence indicates that these dates may be close to the mark. That the *Letter* was addressed to Manuel Komnenos suggests that the date falls in his regnal years (1143–80), but this does not necessarily have to be so. Given that it is a forgery, it is conceivable that it was a retrospective forgery. Zarncke argued that the *Letter* must have been written before 1177, since this is the date that Pope Alexander III sent a reply to it.[45] This argument must be rejected, firstly because the date of Alexander's letter is far from certain, as will be discussed below, but more importantly because it is emphatically *not* a reply to the *Prester John Letter*. Alexander heard about Prester John through the report of his familiar, Master Philip, as he himself states, not by reading the *Prester John Letter*.[46]

Edmond Faral has suggested that similar literary motifs in the *Letter*, Chrétien de Troyes' *Roman d'Enéas* and the anonymous *Sept Merveilles du Monde* suggest that the writers of the latter two texts knew the *Letter* and that we can thus date it to 'environs de 1150–60'.[47] Of course, the relationship could also exist in the opposite direction. The writer of the *Letter* could have known Chrétien de Troyes and the *Sept Merveilles*. This leaves us with Alberic's dating of 1165, the thirteenth-century manuscript's dating of 1170, and the evidence provided by palaeographical analysis. Twenty-five manuscripts containing the *Letter* have been attributed by palaeographers to the twelfth century and six to the turn of the twelfth / thirteenth century.[48] Based on this evidence, then, the best we can say is that the *Letter* was without doubt a creation of the twelfth century, and was probably released c.1165–70.

Bernard Hamilton has convincingly argued that the genesis of the *Prester John Letter* can be found in the fierce conflict between Pope Alexander III and the Holy Roman Emperor Frederick Barbarossa, and

that it initially formed part of a campaign of imperial propaganda aimed at undermining papal authority.[49] In the *Letter*, Prester John's kingdom was presented as a perfect other-world, an antithesis to European society, a utopian vision of a kingdom free from vice and more prosperous than any in the world. And who ruled this perfect society? A man who combined both religious and secular functions, a king and priest. This caesaropapism is in concert with other actions of Frederick's, including the buildup of a cult surrounding the Three Magi and the canonisation of Charlemagne in 1165. According to Hamilton's thesis, the aim of the *Letter* was 'to show that Frederick's concept of church-state relations, unlike that of Alexander III, produced harmony in the Christian world'.[50] Hamilton concludes that the *Letter* was probably written under the direction of Rainald of Dassel, Archbishop of Cologne, one of the major supporters of Frederick Barbarossa.

A comparison between the *Prester John Letter* and other propagandistic literature written in Frederick Barbarossa's inner circle gives further weight to Hamilton's thesis. Such literature was not discussed by Hamilton, or in any other Prester John secondary literature. If we are to understand the *Letter* as a part of an imperial propaganda campaign against Alexander III, then more work should be done to compare it to other such literature originating in Barbarossa's inner circle. One such text, a prophecy entitled *Versus angelici finem*, is preserved in a manuscript in the British Library.[51] It foretells the downfall of Pope Alexander III, who is referred to by his baptismal name: 'Rolandus'. Some of its themes have a profound similarity with those of the *Prester John Letter*: for example, interest in Eastern marvels and monsters, representations of an idealised society, and anti-Greek sentiment. This adds further weight to Hamilton's thesis that the *Prester John Letter* was initially part of Barbarossa's propaganda campaign aimed at undermining support for Pope Alexander III. But was it ever read this way by its medieval audiences? Or did they accept it as a factual diplomatic artefact written by a real oriental potentate?

## Believing and Disbelieving the Letter

Reactions to the *Prester John Letter* were polarised. While some accepted it as a factual document written by Prester John, others were hesitant and felt that the marvels it described were too fantastic to be believed. The decision to believe or disbelieve the *Letter* was ultimately a personal one. This can be demonstrated by the polarity of reactions that is reflected in textual sources that discuss it, and in

scribal marginalia that were sometimes added to it. However, it is first necessary to debunk a legend prevalent in the field of Prester John studies.

The issue of the reception of the *Letter* is often summarily dismissed by historians by reference to Alexander III's letter to John, King of the Indies. One example will suffice to demonstrate this:

I have read this strange document [the *Prester John Letter*] many times and I cannot help feeling that it was written with tongue in cheek from beginning to end. If so, the writer's sense of humour was definitely ahead of his times, for the *Letter* was taken so seriously that Pope Alexander III actually sent an embassy to Prester John to convey his reply and establish diplomatic relations with his country. This happened in 1177. Unfortunately the papal embassy disappeared in mysterious circumstances in Africa or in the East and was never heard of again.[52]

Such a simplistic dismissal of the complex issues of the *Letter*'s reception is extremely dangerous. Firstly, Alexander III appears not to have known of the *Letter* at all, so using his letter as a measure of its acceptance is a gross misinterpretation of history. Secondly, there is no corroborating evidence whatsoever for the mission that Alexander discusses. Thirdly, even if it were the case that the spiritual head of Europe had read and replied to the *Letter*, this would not necessarily indicate that the rest of Catholic Christendom also accepted it as a genuine diplomatic artefact. Clearly, opinions about Alexander's letter must be revised.

Alexander opened his letter to John, King of the Indies, with a statement of papal authority.[53] The Pope was the rightful head of Christendom, through the inheritance of the place granted to St Peter by God. He was writing to John to ensure his observance of Christianity did not deviate from proper Catholic practice. John was to be instructed in the correct faith by Master Philip, the Pope's physician and familiar. If he treated Philip well and replied with a letter stamped with his seal, then Alexander would understand that he had learnt the lessons that he was to be taught, and John would then be understood to be 'so much higher and greater and … less inflated by your riches and power'.[54] Only then was John's church to be admitted into the churches of Saints Peter and Paul.

Zarncke has dated Alexander's letter to 27 September 1177. This has been accepted and repeated by Prester John scholars, however the methodology used to furnish the date leaves much to be desired. Zarncke took the day and month, 27 September, from one copy of Alexander's letter, and a location, Venice, from another. By matching

these two against the movements of Pope Alexander III, Zarncke discovered that Alexander III was only in Venice on 27 September in the year 1177.[55] While this is probably the best methodology for the available data, the date should not be accepted as incontrovertible.

As stated above, there is no evidence whatsoever to suggest that Alexander knew the *Prester John Letter*. This perception has largely pervaded Prester John studies since Zarncke first suggested it in 1879. Zarncke argued this based on Alexander's describing Prester John as 'inflated by riches and power'.[56] This is clearly a thin argument in light of the fact that Prester John's reputation for bombastic largesse is equally attested in the oral traditions, for example, in Otto of Freising's account of the story told by Hugh of Jabala to Pope Eugenius III.[57] In fact, there is good evidence to suggest that Alexander didn't know the *Letter* at all. He makes no quotes from it, nor does he mention any of the *Letter*'s tropes about Prester John's kingdom. Also, if Alexander had read the *Letter*, one would expect him, as a pious Christian, to show interest in St Thomas, whose body rested in Prester John's kingdom according to the *Letter*, however Alexander does not mention Thomas. Moreover, Alexander calls Prester John not 'presbiter Iohannes', as the Letter has it, but 'Iohannes, illustris et magnificus Indorum rex' ('John, illustrious and magnificent king of the Indians'), or in another manuscript variant: 'Iohannes, sacerdos sanctissimus' ('John, most holy priest').[58] If Alexander had read the Letter, he would surely have addressed him as '*Presbiter Iohannes*'. In any case, Alexander tells us that the real source for his information about Prester John was his physician, Master Philip, who apparently brought back the news after having met certain men of Prester John's kingdom while journeying 'in those parts'.[59]

While it is clear that Alexander's letter is not a reply to the *Prester John Letter*, there is little else that can be said about it that is not riddled with problems. Both of the two main hypotheses in circulation about Alexander's letter leave much to be desired. The first, the allegorical hypothesis, holds that it was a reply in kind to the *Prester John Letter*. This was first put forward by Hamilton as a follow-on from his idea that the *Letter* was a piece of imperial propaganda.[60] This hypothesis purports that Alexander, realising that the Letter was a tongue-in-cheek satire penned by one of the partisans of Frederick Barbarossa, wrote a reply to it, emphasising that the papacy was the rightful head of Christendom and that Prester John's caesaropapism was not in line with God's designs for the world. Hamilton, who uncritically accepted Zarncke's date of 27 September 1177, argued that the timing of Alexander's letter was important:

On 24th July 1177, Alexander had the satisfaction of seeing the Emperor Frederick prostrate himself before him, disown the antipope [Callixtus III] and restore the western empire to Alexander's obedience. On 27th September … Alexander wrote to Prester John, emphasising that the emperor of the Indies, who had shown caesaro-papist tendencies in his letter, had now agreed to be instructed in the truths of the Catholic religion by the only competent authority, St Peter's vicar.[61]

Although attractive, this hypothesis does not take account of all the facts. It relies, first of all, on Alexander having read the *Letter*, an assertion for which there is no convincing evidence, as shown above. Secondly, it relies on Zarncke's tenuous dating. Thirdly, and most importantly, it does not account for the person of Master Philip. If Alexander's letter was meant as a reply in kind emphasising the folly of Barbarossa's caesaropapist tendencies, then who was Master Philip and what was his function in Alexander's metaphorical framework? Evidently, the allegorical hypothesis is problematic.

The second hypothesis is that argued above by de Rachewiltz, the factual hypothesis. This purports that the entire scenario was factual, that there was a man named Master Philip who encountered a group of oriental Christians, believed they were the subjects of Prester John, reported this to Alexander III in Rome, and subsequently carried the Pope's letter to them, only to become lost or perish along the way. This hypothesis too presents many problems, mainly because there is no corroboration from other sources, and because Alexander's letter provides us with so few details about what actually happened. One would expect that such a mission would receive at least a cursory treatment in other works if it were real. When such a mission did take place, such as that of Philip the Franciscan to convert the Syrian Jacobites in the 1230s, it was discussed with much more corroboratory detail in contemporary sources.[62]

Furthermore, if a pope were to attempt to establish diplomatic relations with Prester John, it would be an unusual choice to have sent a physician. Papal missions to proselytise oriental potentates were normally conducted by ecclesiastical men of sufficient biblical learning and diplomatic skill, men like those sent to the Mongols in the thirteenth century: Ascelin of Lombardia, Andrew of Longjumeau, Simon of St Quentin, John de Plano Carpini, John of Monte Corvino and so on.[63] Despite the problems it presents, this factual hypothesis is conceivably possible, although to accept it requires filling in the gaps with great stretches of the imagination. One can always maintain hope in the possibility that further research will elucidate the identity of this Master Philip, and myself and Bernard Hamilton are engaged in

just such a research project as this book is going through press.

But regardless of the original circumstances of Alexander's letter, medieval readers appear to have taken the document at face value. His letter was inserted into various chronicles,[64] often accompanied by introductory remarks such as: '[Alexander] also sent his messenger to Prester John; he wrote to him in these words'.[65] That it appears in chronicles at all suggests that it was considered veracious enough to be discussed as a historical fact like any other. Some chroniclers even tried to explain away some of the problems presented by Alexander's letter:

At this time [1181], Pope Alexander elegantly wrote to Prester John, king of the Indians, a letter so that those joined in the Catholic faith be united in all things, and also because this John had previously asked [for this] through his letter, and through his own messenger, namely Philip the doctor [!].[66]

By filling in the history surrounding Master Philip's mission to Prester John, the anonymous author betrays his belief in its reality. He clearly had the same questions about the identity of this Master Philip that we do today, but he explained away the problem by making him Prester John's emissary, not Alexander's. Alberic de Trois-Fontaines recorded a similar story, adding that Master Philip was a bishop, and thereby explaining away the problem of his being a physician sent on an ecclesiastical mission.[67] By filling in these gaps with invention, these chroniclers explained away the problems that Alexander's letter raises, and thereby gave it the appearance of historical truth so as to defend their own reputations as chroniclers using only quality information.

Since Alexander's letter cannot be used to measure the reception of the *Prester John Letter*, we must do this by other means. Kim Phillips has recently suggested that one manuscript copy of the *Letter* was appreciated for its entertainment value because the manuscript also contained fabliaux, romances, games, party tricks, and humorous songs; another copy surrounded by devotional works was valued for its depiction of a moral utopia, she claimed. While these are probably valuable approaches for individual manuscripts, generalising reception of the *Letter* based on surrounding manuscript contents would be futile because there are so many copies of the text that one may find it next to nearly anything![68] Despite the fact that the *Prester John Letter* was extremely popular as a text circulated independently, a fact probably affected by its brevity, it was used or discussed by surprisingly few authors. Alberic de Trois-Fontaines, one of the few who did mention it, presented it as a factual diplomatic document, prefaced by the

words: ‘And at this time [1165], Prester John, King of the Indians, sent his letters full of astonishing things to various kings of Christendom’.[69] Only one other chronicler mentioned the *Letter*, and he also discussed it as a factual diplomatic artefact.[70] That it is discussed in only two chronicles is a curious statistical anomaly. If it were not for the massive manuscript count, it would almost appear that it were an obscure and unpopular text. Given that it was so widely copied, and that it appears in so few works of history, it seems that it was for the most part regarded as a work of unhistorical character.[71]

This is especially pertinent given that the figure of Prester John was discussed so widely without mention of the *Letter*. From the end of the twelfth century, he appeared in an extraordinarily broad range of texts. He was sung about by troubadours. He is found in chronicles. He made appearances in fictional literature as an exemplar of the perfect moral society. He was used as a propaganda tool. He was seen in pedagogical texts, and satires on university life. We find him in descriptions of real events occurring in the Far East, such as the world-shattering Mongol conquests. He continued to play a part in legendary tracts about the East. He appeared in encyclopaedias, geographical treatises, travel literature, in real diplomatic communications between popes and emperors, and in maps.[72]

Despite the fact that belief in Prester John as a real geographical figure seems to have been pervasive, it seems that, although it was extremely popular, the *Letter* was for the most part regarded with scepticism. This is the same picture that we arrive at from an analysis of the marginalia found on the manuscripts of the *Letter*. Most manuscripts contain no scribal comment, simply calling the *Letter* an *epistola* or *littera* (‘letter’), or sometimes *liber* (‘book’), *historia* (‘history’/‘story’), or *descriptio regionis Indie* (‘description of the region of India’).[73] Most scribes repeated the usual claims, that it was sent by Prester John to Manuel Komnenos, that it described the marvels of India, and so on.

Some scribes, however, added curious advice or guidelines for reading. In one fifteenth-century manuscript, for example, the writer called the *Letter* an ‘unbelievable sermon’ and at the end of the text he warned his audience: ‘Believe it if you will; it is not Gospel’.[74] On the other hand, some manuscripts affirmed the marvels. The following reading instructions were added before the *Letter* by one fifteenth-century scribe: ‘Read happily and hear the marvels of the world!’[75] Another scribe of the fifteenth century pointed to other texts written in the same manuscript for confirmation of some of the stories in the *Letter*, namely the reports about the Three Magi.[76] By the seventeenth century, it was safe for one scribe to say that the *Letter* was not

actually written by Prester John himself but that it was of uncertain authorship.[77] Likewise, another seventeenth-century copyist called it not an 'epistola' but a 'pseudepistola'.[78] But the only advice given in any twelfth-century copy, when Prester John was still a new phenomenon, gave the following non-committal advice: 'If you want to believe it, believe it'.[79] Although subscribing firmly to neither belief nor disbelief, the very inclusion of this comment suggests at least that the scribe was doubtful about the *Letter*'s truth claims. According to the manuscripts, then, the *Letter* trod the fine line between fact and fiction for its medieval audiences *and* ultimately one's reaction to the text was personal, individual, and private.

For those who were inclined to believe the *Letter*, however, it was necessary to explain how it travelled from Prester John's pen to Europe. Several hypotheses were put forward to resolve this problem. Redaction E of the *Letter* provides one example, concluding with the following:

> Here ends the book or history of Prester John, which was translated from Greek into Latin by Christian, Archbishop of Mainz. This Christian was succeeded by Archbishop Conrad. This Manuel reigned in Greece from 1144 A.D. to 1180 A.D.[80]

Some manuscripts of Redaction E added further detail to the story, that Christian of Mainz 'was at that time in Greece, having been sent [there] by the Roman emperor, and he carried [the *Letter*] with him into the kingdom of the Teutons [i.e. Germany]'.[81] Although Christian of Mainz was a real person, there is no outside proof for the conjecture that he brought the *Letter* from Constantinople to Germany, or that he translated it from Greek to Latin, although he has been at times considered as a candidate for having penned the *Prester John Letter*, and reasonably so. Despite this, such a claim gave it the semblance of reality and explained how the *Letter* came to Europe from the kingdom of Prester John.

Other elements added to various versions made the *Letter* appear more realistic. Some provided an alternative story to that discussed above to explain how the *Letter* came to European eyes. For example, one twelfth-century manuscript prefaced the *Letter* with the following: '[Here begin] the letters of Prester John to Emanuel, emperor of the Constantinopolitans, … which the same Emanuel, after having had it translated from Arabic to Latin [!], sent to Pope Alexander'.[82] That the *Letter* was originally thought to have been written in Arabic is indicative of the scribe's understandable lack of knowledge of the breadth and complexity of Asian cultures. Nevertheless, the invention added weight to the *Letter*'s air of factuality. In the same vein, some

manuscripts provided a date and a location for the writing of the *Letter*, thus bringing it into line with proper epistolary norms.[83] These various elements added gave the text a heightened credibility.

But despite the efforts of the original author and his redactors to try to convince their audiences that the *Letter* was a factual diplomatic artefact, there were still many who doubted the fantastic stories that it told, men like the redactor who said it was not Gospel, or the scribe who called it a 'pseudepistola'. There is no evidence, however, to suggest that such sceptics doubted the existence of Prester John entirely.

## Prester John as a Geographical Entity

Despite the fact that many doubted the *Letter*'s marvels, Prester John seems to have been accepted as a real geographical entity, usually placed in Asia, but increasingly in Ethiopia from the fourteenth century onwards. Of course, believing in Prester John as a real geographical figure did not necessarily conflict with disbelieving the *Letter*. One could both believe the *Letter* was false, but nevertheless accept Prester John as real, as some modern writers did explicitly.[84] After all, readers of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* do not doubt the historicity of the original Scottish king just because he appeared in a work of fiction. Could not medieval people have reacted the same way to Prester John and his *Letter*?

It was no aberration of logic to believe in Prester John but doubt the fictions associated with him. In fact, this standpoint was made much easier by the significant change in the idea of Prester John that was taking place by the thirteenth century. In the later period, Prester John came to be understood not as the name of a single person, but as a title for a line of kings, usually the emperors of Ethiopia. It is usually under this connection that Prester John made his appearances in maps, sometimes accompanied by his legendary accoutrements, and sometimes not. In either case, whether or not one believed in the marvels of Prester John's kingdom, there is no evidence for complete doubt towards Prester John until the eighteenth century, when Benito Jerónimo Feijóo y Montenegro, the final source in this volume, became the first person to explicitly state that Prester John did not exist and never had.

The earliest record of someone doubting the fantastical nature of Prester John, though, occurs in the travelogue of William of Rubruck, who had been sent by Louis IX of France to evangelise the Mongols in the 1250s. In the account he wrote of his travels, he recorded that the kingdom of Prester John owed its fabulous reputation to the

propensity of Nestorians to tell tall stories. After this, William then wrote: 'And [when] I crossed through his fields, no one knew anything about him, except for a few Nestorians'.[85] There is an important semantic point to be made here. William does not doubt the existence of Prester John entirely; he only doubts the tales told about him by the Nestorians. While he does not record precisely what he heard, it is safe to assume that the stories were of similar bombast to those found in the famous Prester John Letter.

Other writers had the same doubts about the marvels associated with the name of Prester John. Roger Bacon, who met William of Rubruck after he had returned to Europe from his Mongol mission,[86] had much the same to say as William did when he wrote about Prester John in the geographical section of his *Opus Majus*: 'And this Black Cathay was the land of Prester John, or King John, about whom there was accustomed to be such a great rumour, and [about whom] many false things have been written and said'.[87] Roger's scepticism of the 'many false things said about Prester John' is probably a result of his conversations with William of Rubruck mentioned above, who had passed through Prester John's land and found it to be disappointing. However, his reference to the 'many false things written about Prester John' seems to be a veiled reference to the *Prester John Letter*. Amazingly, despite Roger's scepticism about both the oral and written traditions, he still believed Prester John to be a real geographical entity, the leader of the land of Black Cathay (i.e. Kara-Khitai, Kara being Turkic for 'black', and Khitai being the name of Yēlǘ Dàshí's tribe, and the etymological origin of the English 'Cathay').

Another later travel writer showed similar disappointment upon passing Prester John's kingdom. Odoric of Pordenone (c.1286–1331), who travelled through Asia in the early fourteenth century, wrote in his travelogue: 'I came towards the land of Prestiçane [Prester John], and not one hundredth part is true of that which is said of him as though it were undeniable'.[88] Like William of Rubruck and Roger Bacon, Odoric doubted some of the stories told about Prester John but still believed him to be a real geographical entity in some sense. When he passed through the Central Asian steppe, finding it to be not in concert with his preconceived notion of Prester John, he felt this meant that Prester John was the subject of much exaggeration, but still real, rather than that he had never existed at all.

Disbelieving the marvels but still believing in his reality was made easier by an important conceptual shift: the evolution of Prester John from man to title. At the outset, 'Prester John' was understood as a single person, a flesh and blood mortal who ruled over a marvellous kingdom. According to Otto of Freising's account, he was the person responsible for the military defeat of the ' Samiards' in the Battle of

Qatwan. Equally, the *Prester John Letter* was a diplomatic communication from a single person, Prester John, to another single person, Manuel Komnenos. The same can be said about Alexander III's letter in which he was a single person with the title of 'King of the Indians'.

However, by the thirteenth century, a trend was emerging by which Prester John could be understood not as a single person, but as a title. This was prominent in the later Middle Ages, especially after Prester John had come to be associated with the office of the Ethiopian emperor. For example, when the Portuguese missionary and explorer Francisco Álvares (c.1465–c.1540) wrote an account of his experiences in Ethiopia, he titled it *Verdadeira Informação das Terras do Preste João das Indias* ('A True Relation of the Lands of *the* Prester John of the Indies').[89] The use of the definite article ('the') is significant. This occurs not only in the title, but also throughout the text, where one can find forms such as *o Preste João* ('the Prester John'), *do Preste João* ('of the Prester John' / 'from the Prester John') and *ao Preste João* ('to the Prester John' / 'for the Prester John'). Álvares knew that the Prester John's name was Lebna Dengel (1501–40), and that his real title was *negus* (emperor), but he felt it more appropriate to use the term 'the Prester John' when writing for his European audience. This consistent use of the definite article is reflective of the understanding of Prester John as a title, rather than as a single person.

Although Prester John's metamorphosis from a man to a title was current by this late stage, the change can actually be ascribed to a remarkably early date. In fact, this transition may have occurred as early as the beginning of the thirteenth century. The appearance of Prester John in Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzival*, dated to the early thirteenth century, is indicative of a transitional period during which Prester John was understood as both an individual and a title. Prester John plays a minor role in the story, appearing as a man, the son of the grail maiden Repanse and the half-Saracen Feirefiz, but a man whose name subsequently became the title for a line of kings descended from the original man named Prester John.[90] Although *Parzival* is a fictional text, this remark represents a conceptual transition in the understanding of 'Prester John'. While earlier writers thought of Prester John as a single man and later writers thought of Prester John as a title, Wolfram von Eschenbach saw him as encapsulating both.

The same dual understanding can be found in Marco Polo's famous descriptions of Asia written at the end of the thirteenth century. Marco Polo identifies 'Prestre Joan' as Unc Can, a real individual.[91] But later on in the narrative, '*le* Prestre Johan' is used to refer to the

title of a man who has a romanticised political struggle against a certain 'King of Gold'.[92] Furthermore, Marco Polo identifies a real man as the grandson of Prester John. In doing so, he calls him 'le filz au filz *dou* Prestre Joan' and not 'le filz au filz *de* Prestre Joan', that is to say: 'the grandson of *the* Prester John' and not 'the grandson of Prester John'.[93] Marco Polo, then, displays the same dual understanding as Wolfram von Eschenbach. While the term 'Prester John' was used to refer to a real individual, a man by the name of Unc Can, it was also used as the title for a line of kings.

This change in the understanding of Prester John allowed him to be much more settled in the European worldview, as soon as his land and his kingdom could be conclusively 'found'. The writer of the famous *Prester John Letter* had written that Prester John lived 'in the Three Indias'.[94] The vague medieval notion of 'India', a by-word for the unknown world beyond the Islamic territories of the Near East, allowed for almost any territorial identification for Prester John's land in an eastern or southern direction from Jerusalem. So, when an Ethiopian embassy arrived in Europe in the early fourteenth century, this provided the catalyst for the most popular and enduring identification of Prester John, that is, as a title for the Emperors of Ethiopia.[95] Indeed, much about Ethiopia was in concert with Prester John's reputation. Both Prester John and the Ethiopian emperor were powerful oriental potentates. Both were devout Christians. Both were opulent. Both were piously interested in the holy city of Jerusalem. And both were seeking alliance against the common Saracen enemy for the good of the universal Christian faith.

The association between Prester John and the emperors of Ethiopia extended the longevity of the legend for several centuries. Once this association had been cemented, there was little reason to doubt 'Prester John's existence.'. 'The Prester John' became simply a title for a foreign leader, the Ethiopian equivalent of other common romanticised titles Europeans used for Asian rulers, like 'the Grand Khan of the Tartars', or 'the Caliph of Babylon'. When Prester John was used in this way, much of the legendary stories about him faded into the background. It took 300 years for the association between Prester John and Ethiopia to be unravelled, based on an inquiry into the apparent Ethiopian origins of the term 'Prester John'. And even when it became clear that it was not an Ethiopian term, and that the Ethiopians had never used it for their emperors, rather than discard Prester John entirely, European writers once again sought him in Asia. Even outspoken sceptics like Voltaire, who is excerpted below, made arguments along these lines.

The perception that Prester John was a real geographical entity therefore persisted even when his association with Ethiopia was being

brought under intense scrutiny in the seventeenth century by linguists and travellers such as Hiob Ludolf (1624–1704). Ludolf, an accomplished Ethiopic linguist, debunked a prevalent fifteenth- and sixteenth-century hypothesis regarding the origin of the name Prester John in the Ethiopic phrase: *Prete O Jan Hoi* ('Do me Justice, O my king'), which was shouted out to the emperor at legal proceedings. In fact, this hypothesis was sometimes accepted even as late as the end of the eighteenth century, as by explorer James Bruce: 'These complaints [to the emperor], whether real or feigned, have always for their burden *Rete O Jan hoi!*, which, repeated quick, very much resembles Prete Jianni, the name that was given to this prince, of which we never knew the derivation'.[96] In debunking this hypothesis, Ludolf argued that its supporters were ignorant of the fact that the 'real' Prester John was not African, but Asian, an opinion which he came to from having read Marco Polo's *Travels*, a text which was for the most part regarded as a geographical authority by early modern geographers.[97]

A great many scholars and intellectual heavyweights of the early modern era in fact proposed arguments similar to Ludolf's: that Prester John could not have been an Ethiopian monarch because Marco Polo's book proves that he was to be found in Asia. So even when the strings that bound Prester John to Ethiopia were being undone as late as the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, he was still believed to have been a real historical figure in medieval Asia. Thus, in the early modern era, when the process of debunking Prester John was well under way, it was initially his association with Ethiopia that was brought under scrutiny, rather than his existence.

The strength of belief in Prester John as a real geographical entity is also reflected in his widespread presence in maps dating from the fourteenth through to eighteenth centuries, as discussed in Appendix 3. But although Prester John never existed, at least not in the form he was imagined to exist, it is important to note that belief in him as a real geographical figure did not necessarily impede the progress of geographical discovery, since fantasy is a necessary step before discovery:

When exploration is viewed as a process rather than as a series of distinct events, its major components – establishment of objectives, performance of operations to implement them, and the consequences of the operations – are clearly related to the imagination. No exploratory venture begins without objectives based on the imagined nature and content of the lands to be explored. Imagination becomes a behavioural factor in geographical discovery as courses of action are laid out according to preconceived images; later decisions based on

field observations may be distorted by these images. The results of exploration are modified by reports written and interpreted in the light of persistent illusions and by attempts made to fit new information into partly erroneous systems and frameworks of geographical understanding.[98]

This schema fits the legend of Prester John perfectly. Travellers and mapmakers, believing him to be a real geographical entity, acted accordingly by seeking his kingdom or representing it in maps. The quest for Prester John was a common secondary objective for travellers, and occasionally the primary objective.[99] Different courses of action were sometimes taken as a result of belief in him. One extreme example is that one of the primary reasons for the failure of the Fifth Crusade was that the crusaders delayed action against the Muslims because they were waiting for military aid from Chingis Khan, who they believed to be Prester John.[100] The results of exploration were often modified by the illusion of Prester John, as in the case of travellers such as William of Rubruck or Odoric of Pordenone who had travelled to Asia, found it to be unlike their preconceived notions of Prester John, and yet still reported back that they had passed through his kingdom. The strength of belief was therefore self-perpetuating. When one heard a traveller say he had passed through his land, or saw a map containing him, or read about him, this only increased his verisimilitude. These factual authorities seem to have been strong enough to ensure that those who disbelieved the marvels associated with him nevertheless believed him to be a real geographical entity. Accepting these trustworthy authorities, one would then repeat the story as fact, either orally or in writing, and therefore pass on the legend, and so Prester John was propelled from the Middle Ages into the modern era.

## Conclusion

The Prester John legend was initially based on actualities. The melding of the stories of Patriarch John and the Battle of Qatwan into the legend of Prester John involved a few steps of modification, assumption, and creative forgery before it would come to be an accepted part of medieval conceptions of the world. Disbelieving his existence entirely was a non-existent viewpoint in the Middle Ages, according to the written sources we have access to, but there were probably some disbelievers who are hidden to historical inquiry. The famous *Letter* was certainly not universally accepted. Because it was unverifiable, like the entire ‘Marvels of the East’ tradition, one’s belief

or disbelief was ultimately personal, private, and without consequence. The monsters and marvels of Prester John's kingdom were neither completely verifiable, nor completely falsifiable, and most were within the bounds of conceptuality, simply being natural phenomena taken to their logical extremes, as a giant is just a person made large, or a pygmy a person made small. This is why we see such a polarised reaction to the text, which was sometimes held as *verissimus*, 'the highest truth', a factual diplomatic artefact brought to Europe from the hand of Prester John himself, and sometimes presented as a *pseudepistola,* a 'fake letter'. Despite the corroboration provided by the Marvels of the East traditions, the text's politico-moral agenda and humorous literary construction meant that the majority of its audiences probably viewed it as a fictive text, a piece of entertainment. But regardless of whether or not readers and listeners were inclined to believe in the *Letter*'s tall stories, there remains no single record of a person suggesting that Prester John was not a real geographical entity in some form or another, whether it was as a warlord of the Mongolian steppe, as the King of Christian Ethiopia, or even as the Dalai Lama, an idea which emerged late in the legend only after Tibet came to the attention of Europeans in the seventeenth century.

There was only so much that could actually be known about the distant world of Asia in the myopic world of medieval Europe, and the amazing complexity of God's creation seemed to suggest that anything was possible. Because medieval people could not see and experience the Orient for themselves, they filled in the gap with fabulous encyclopaedias, travellers' tales, and legends like that of Prester John. In doing so, were they dreaming of another world? No, they were dreaming of their own.

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1 William of Newburgh, *Historia Rerum Anglicarum,* Howlett, R. (ed.), *Chronicles of the Reigns of Stephen, Henry II, and Richard I* (London, 1884), p. 18: 'de cujus sapientia et sinceritate dubitare fas non est'.

2 Ibid., p. 14: 'effrenata mentiendi libidine'.

3 Ibid., p. 12: 'nenias ex Britannico transtulit, quibus … ex proprio figmento multum adjecit … per superductum Latini sermonis colorem honesto historiae nomine palliavit'.

4 Ibid., p. 17: 'An alium orbem somniat infinita regna habentem, in quo ea contigerunt quae supra memoravit?'

5 On reception studies, see Geert Lernout, 'Reception Theory', in Michael Groden, Martin Kreiswirth and Imre Szeman (eds), *The Johns Hopkins Guide to Literary Theory and Criticism* (Baltimore, 2nd edn, 2005), pp. 610–11; Madeline Harrison Caviness, 'Reception of Images by Medieval Viewers', in Conrad Rudolph (ed.), *A Companion to Medieval Art: Romanesque and Gothic in Northern Europe* (Malden, 2006), pp. 65–85, here pp. 65–7; Hans Robert Jauss, *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception,* Timothy Bahti (trans.) (Minneapolis, 1982), pp. vii–xxix.

[6] For a summary of the research up to 1997, see Peter Jackson, 'Prester John Redivivus: a Review Article', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society,* vol. 7, no.3 (1997), pp. 425–32.

[7] See Benito Jerónimo Feijóo y Montenegro (below on pp 270–71).

[8] João de Barros, *Asia*, for which see below, pp 288.

[9] Buddhism was for all intents and purposes unknown in twelfth-century Europe. The popular story of *Barlaam and Josaphat*, which depicts the life of the Buddha, was altered in European language versions so that the Buddha was a Christian. Latin edition in PL, vol. 73 (1849), coll. 0443–0604. See also Audrius Beinorius, 'Buddhism in the Early European Imagination: A Historical Perspective', *Acta Orientalia Vilnensia*, vol. 6, no. 2 (2005), pp. 7–22.

[10] Rudolf Wittkower, 'Marvels of the East. A Study in the History of Monsters', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, vol. 5 (1942), pp. 159–97.

[11] Keagan Brewer, *Wonder and Skepticism in the Middle Ages* (forthcoming, September 2015).

[12] Zarncke, *Abh.1*, pp. 837–43; also reproduced and translated below, pp. 75–8.

[13] Zarncke, *Abh.1*, pp. 831–6.

[14] Wilhelm Baum, *Die Verwandlungen des Mythos vom Reich des Priesterkönigs Johannes* (Klagenfurt, 1999), p. 353. The additional four, which I have not had the opportunity to examine, are: 1) Rein, Stiftsbibliothek, Codex Runensis 55, ff.166a–168a, 13th C.; 2) Kremsmünster, Stiftsbibliothek, Codex Cremifanensis 253, ff.144a–146a, 13th/14th C.; 3) Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Codex Vindobonensis Palatinus 480, ff.48b–50a, 13th C.; 4) Lamback, Stiftsbibliothek, Codex Lambacensis Chartaceus 223, ff.217a–219a, 15th C.

[15] Zarncke, *Abh.1*, pp. 845–6; also reproduced below, pp 41–2.

[16] Below, p. 41.

[17] Vsevolod Slessarev, *Prester John: the Letter and the Legend* (Minneapolis, 1959), pp. 9–25.

[18] Other examples include George Psalmanazar and Eldad ha Dani. The latter is relevant to Prester John, for which see David J. Wasserstein, 'Eldad ha-Dani and Prester John', in *PJMTLT*, pp. 213–36.

[19] Hartmann Schedel, Stephan Füssel (ed.), *Chronicle of the World, 1493 – the Complete and Annotated Nuremberg Chronicle* (Köln, 2001), f.147v.

[20] Otto of Freising, *De Duabus Civitatibus,* Adolf Hofmeister (ed.), in *MGH, SS., RGUS* (Hanover, 1912), pp. xii–xvi.

[21] Gustav Oppert, *Der Presbyter Johannes in Sage und Geschichte* (Berlin, 1864), pp. 121–61; Zarncke, *Abh.1*, pp. 850–71; Richard Hennig, 'Das Christentum im mittelalterlichen Asien und sein Einfluss auf die Saga vom 'Priester Johannes" *Historische Vierteljahrschrift*, vol. 29 (1935), pp. 234–52; Richard Hennig, *Terrae Incognitae* (Leiden, 1937), vol. 2, pp. 361–76 [in German].

[22] I have preferred the modern *pin-yin* transliteration system; the older Wade-Giles system, which does not take account of tonality, would have Yēlǘ Dàshí as Yeh-Lü Ta-Shih.

[23] Ibn al-Athīr, Donald S. Richards (trans.), *The Chronicle of Ibn al-Athir for the Crusading Period from al-Kamil fi'l-ta'rikh* (Aldershot, 2006), vol. 1, p. 363.

[24] Ibn al-Athīr, Richards (trans.), vol. 1, pp. 359–63. Other primary sources for the battle were discussed by Zarncke, *Abh.1*, pp. 850–62. For the general political background, see Michal Biran, *The Empire of the Kara-Khitai in Eurasian History* (Cambridge, 2005), pp. 19–41; Karl A. Wittfogel and Feng Chia-Shêng, 'History of Chinese Society: Liao', *Transactions of the American Historical Society, New Series,* vol. 36 (1946), pp. i-752, here pp. 619–73; Vasily (Wilhelm) Barthold, *Turkestan Down to the Mongol Invasions* (London, 1928; reprinted 1968).

[25] Other far less convincing hypotheses have been suggested. For an African

origin hypothesis, see Constantine Marinescu, 'Le Prêtre Jean, son pays, explication de son nom', *Bulletin de la Section Historique de l'Académie Roumaine*, vol. 10 (1923), pp. 73–112; Constantine Marinescu, 'Encore une fois le problème du Prêtre Jean', *Bulletin de la Section Historique de l'Académie Roumaine,* vol. 26 (1945), pp. 202–22. For an Indian hypothesis, see Andrew Athappilly, 'An Indian Prototype for Prester John', *Terrae Incognitae*, vol. 10 (1978), pp. 15–25. For a Georgian hypothesis but which makes factual errors, see Philipp Bruun, 'Die Verwandlungen des Presbyter Johannes', *Zeitschrift der Gesellschaft für Erkunde zu Berlin,* vol. 11 (1876), pp. 279–314. For a hypothesis suggesting that Prester John was an allegorical message with no historical prototype, see Leonardo Olschki, 'Der Brief des Presbyters Johannes', *Historische Zeitschrift,* vol. 144 (1931), pp. 1–14. For a readable discussion of the more tenable of these hypotheses, see Charles E. Nowell, 'The Historical Prester John', *Speculum*, vol. 28, no.3 (July, 1953), pp. 435–15.

26 See below, pp 44–5.

27 Otto of Freising, *De Duabus Civitatibus*, Hofmeister (ed.), p. 365, footnote i.

28 Pope Eugenius III, *Quantum Praedecessores*, in PL, vol. 180, coll.1064A–1066A

29 See below, pp. 97–139.

30 See Appendix 1, p. 274.

31 See graph below on p. 313.

32 A vast corpus of secondary literature has appeared exploring the utopian aspects of the *Letter*: Karl F. Helleiner, 'Prester John's Letter: A Medieval Utopia', *Phoenix,* vol. 13, no.2 (Summer, 1959), pp. 47–57; István Bejczy, *Pape Jansland en Utopia. De verbeelding van de beschaving van middeleeuwen en renaissance* (Nimègue, 1994); István Bejczy, *La Lettre du Prêtre Jean: Une Utopie Médiévale* (Paris, 2001); Hilário Franco Jr., 'La construction d'une Utopie: l'Empire du Prêtre Jean', *Journal of Medieval History*, vol. 23, no.3 (1997), pp. 211–25; P. Stromholm, 'An Essay on the Medieval Mind: the Letter of Prester John', *Middelalderforum*, vol. 9 (1984), pp. 82–93; Martin Gosman, 'Le royaume du Pretre Jean: l'Interpretation d'un Bonheur', in D. Buschinger (ed.), *L'idée de bonheur au moyen âge* (Göppingen, 1990), pp. 213–23; Gioia Zaganelli, 'Contradiction et Conciliation en Utopie: La Lettre du Prêtre Jean', in Trousson, R. (ed.), *Requiem pour l'Utopie* (Pise, 1986), pp. 19–34; Olschki, 'Der Brief des Presbyters Johannes'.

33 Slessarev, *Prester John: the Letter and the Legend*, pp. 41–7.

34 See Appendix 2.

35 Zarncke, *Abh.1*, pp. 872–908.

36 Bettina Wagner, *Die 'Epistola Presbiteri Johannis'* (Tübingen, 2000), pp. 150–216

37 Ibid., pp. 345–466.

38 See below, pp. 67–8.

39 Helleiner, '*Prester John's Letter: A Medieval Utopia'*, p. 48.

40 Below, pp. 76–8.

41 Malcolm Letts, 'Prester John: Sources and Illustrations', *Notes and Queries*, vol. 188 (1945), pp. 178–80, 204–7, 246–8, 266–8 and vol. 189, (1945), pp. 4–7.

42 See below, p. 146.

43 E.g. Charles-Victor Langlois, *La Connaissance de la Nature et du Monde* (Paris, 1927), p. 46; Malcolm Letts, 'Prester John: A Fourteenth-Century Manuscript at Cambridge', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society, Fourth Series*, vol. 29 (1947), pp. 19–26, here p. 21; Robert Anthony Vitale, *Edition and Study of the Letter of Prester John to the Emperor Manuel of Constantinople: the Anglo-Norman Rhymed Version* (University of Maryland, Ph.D Thesis, 1975), p. 4.

44 MS.56 (Wagner, Die '*Epistola Prebyteri Johannis'*, p. 53)

45 Zarncke, *Abh.1*, pp. 877–8. See below (pp. 13–17) for a discussion of this

letter, and pp. 92–6 for an edition and translation.

[46] See below, p. 94.

[47] Edmond Faral, *Recherches sur les sources latines des contes et romans courtois du Moyen Âge* (Paris, 1913), pp. 161–7.

[48] See Appendix 2 at p. 312.

[49] Bernard Hamilton, 'Prester John and the Three Kings of Cologne', in Henry Mayr-Harting and Robert I. Moore (eds), *Studies in Medieval History presented to R.H.C. Davis* (London, 1985), pp. 177–91; also reprinted in *PJMTLT*, pp. 171–85.

[50] Ibid., p. 186 (original pagination).

[51] London, British Library, MS. Add.22349, 14th C., ff.203b–207b.

[52] Igor de Rachewiltz, *Prester John and Europe's Discovery of East Asia* (Canberra, 1972), p. 7.

[53] See below, pp. 94–6.

[54] See below, p. 96.

[55] Zarncke, *Abh.1*, p. 939.

[56] Ibid., p. 877–8.

[57] See below, pp. 44–5.

[58] Zarncke, *Abh.1*, p. 941, footnote d.

[59] Below, p. 94.

[60] Hamilton, 'Prester John and the Three Kings of Cologne', pp. 188–90 (original pagination).

[61] Ibid., p. 190 (original pagination).

[62] Matthew Paris, *Chronica Majora,* H.R. Luard (ed.) (London, 1874), vol. 3, pp. 396–100; Alberic de Trois-Fontaines, *Chronica*, Scheffer-Boichorst, P. (ed.), in *MGH, SS.*, vol. 23 (Hannover, 1874), pp. 631–950, here pp. 935–6.

[63] For these men generally, see Igor de Rachewiltz, *Papal Envoys to the Great Khans* (London, 1971), and Jean Richard, *La Papauté et les missions d'Orient au Moyen Age (XIIIe – XVe Siècles*) (Rome, 1977).

[64] Roger of Howden, *Chronica,* W. Stubbs (ed.) (London, RS, 1869), vol. 2, pp. 167–70; *Flores Historiarum,* H.R. Luard (ed.) (London, RS, 1890), vol. 2, pp. 92–3; Matthew Paris, *Chronica Majora*, vol. 2, pp. 316–7; Matthew Paris, *Historia Anglorum*, F. Madden (ed.) (London, RS, 1866), vol. 1, pp. 422–3; Alberic de Trois-Fontaines, *Chronica*, pp. 853–4.

[65] *Gesta regis Henrici II et Richardi I*, W. Stubbs (ed.) (London, RS, 1867), p. 98 [published as by Benedict of Peterborough, a.k.a. Benedictus Abbas but now attributed to Roger of Howden, for which see Doris M. Stenton, 'Roger of Howden and Benedict', *The English Historical Review*, vol. 68, no.269 (October, 1953), pp. 574–82.

[66] *Flores Historiarum*, vol. 2, pp. 92–3.

[67] See below, p. 146.

[68] Kim Phillips, *Before Orientalism: Asian Peoples and Cultures in European Travel Writing, 1245–1510* (Philadelphia, 2014), p.47.

[69] See below, p. 146.

[70] Geoffrey de Bruil, O.Holger-Edder (ed.), in *MGH, SS.,* vol. 26 (Hannover, 1882), p. 202.

[71] I am here working on the assumption that histories and chronicles were widely regarded as carrying high verisimilitude. This is a good generalisation for the Middle Ages: Keagan Brewer, *Wonder and Skepticism in the Middle Ages* (forthcoming, September 2015), particularly chapter six.

[72] See Appendices 1 and 3.

[73] See below, p. 315.

[74] 'Sermo incredibilis'; 'Crede si vis, non est ewangelium': MS.120, see Wagner, pp. 88–9.

75 'Lege feliciter et audies mirabilia mundi', MS.86 (Wagner, p. 69).

76 'De hoc invenies plus post folio C 13 de tribus regibus': MS.89 (Wagner, p. 71).

77 'Auctor incerti nominis': MS.91a (Wagner, p. 72).

78 MS.204a (Wagner, p. 131).

79 'Si uis credere, crede': MS.183 (Wagner, p. 122).

80 'Explicit liber sive historia presbiteri Iohannis, quae translata fuit de Graeco in Latinum a Christiano Maguntino archiepiscopo. Iste Christianus superpositus fuit Chunrado archiepiscopo. Iste Manuel regnavit in Graecia ab anno domini 1144 usque ad annum domini 1180': Zarncke (ed.), *Abh.1*, p. 924.

81 'Tunc erat in grecia a romano imperatore missus, secum [epistolam] attulit in regnum teutonicorum': MS.32 (Wagner, p. 41) and MS.85 (Wagner, p. 39).

82 'Epistole presbiteri Johannis ad emmanuelem imperatorem constantinopolitanum … quam idem emmanuel translatam de arabico in latinum misit Alexandro pape': MS.128 (Wagner, p. 92).

83 Zarncke (ed.), *Abh.1*, p. 924; MS.151 (Wagner, p. 104).

84 See, for example, François Petit de la Croix, below on pp. 259–60.

85 See below p. 163.

86 See the introduction to Peter Jackson's translation of William of Rubruck, *The Mission of Friar William of Rubruck: His Journey to the Court of the Great Khan Möngke, 1253–1255* (London, 1990), pp. 39–47.

87 See below, p. 167.

88 Below, p. 196.

89 An excerpt can be found below at pp.217–18.

90 'Repanse de schoye mohte dô / alrêst ir verte wesen vrô. / diu gebar sît in Indyân / ein sun, der hiez Jôhan. / Priester Jôhan man den hiez: / immer sît man dâ die künege liez / bî dem namn belîben'. Wolfram von Eschenbach, *Parzival*, Karl Lachmann (ed.) (Frankfurt am Main, 1994), book 822, ll.21–7, vol. 2, p. 400.

91 See below, p. 178; for a discussion of Unc Can (i.e. Ong Khan), see E. Denison Ross, 'Prester John and the Empire of Ethiopia', in Arthur P. Newton, (ed.), *Travel and Travellers of the Middle Ages* (New York, 1926), pp. 174–94, here p. 182 or de Rachewiltz, *Papal Envoys to the Great Khans,* p. 114.

92 Below, pp. 183–4 (Italics mine).

93 Below, pp. 185.

94 Below, p. 68.

95 Raleigh A. Skelton, 'Appendix III – An Ethiopian Embassy to Western Europe in 1306', in Osbert Guy Stanhope Crawford, *Ethiopian Itineraries circa 1400–1524* (Cambridge, 1958), pp. 212–215; Charles Beckingham, 'An Ethiopian Embassy to Europe, c.1310', *Journal of Semitic Studies*, vol. 14 (1989), pp. 337–16; reprinted in *PJMTLT*, pp. 197–206.

96 Below, p. 298.

97 Below, pp. 351–3.

98 John L. Allen, 'Lands of Myth, Waters of Wonder: the Place of the Imagination in the History of Geographical Exploration', in David Lowenthal and Martyn J. Bowden (eds), *Geographies of the Mind* (New York, 1976), pp. 41–61, here p. 43.

99 As in the case of the travels of Afonso de Paiva and Pêro da Covilhã, who were sent with multiple aims, including finding the origin of spices like cinnamon, and to locate Prester John and secure his allegiance, see below, pp. 213, 217–18.

100 See below on p. 97 and also Bernard Hamilton, 'Continental Drift: Prester John's progress through the Indies', in *PJMTLT*, p. 10.

# THE SOURCES

# Section 1 – The Beginnings of Prester John (Twelfth Century)

*In 1122, a mysterious man calling himself John, Patriarch of the Indians, appeared in Rome and narrated before Pope Calixtus II stories of marvels and miracles which took place in his homeland, especially in connection with St Thomas, who in Christian tradition was supposed to have converted India. Twenty years later, when a tremendous battle took place in the Far East (the Battle of Qatwan near Samarkand in 1141), Europeans would cast their mind back to this earlier John. In reality, the battle was between a Mongol warlord by the name of Yēlǖ Dàshí and the leader of the Muslim world, Sultan Sanjār, who was utterly defeated. Crusaders in the Holy Land interpreted this victorious Mongol warlord to be a mighty Christian king, and dubbed him Prester John, convinced that he intended to assist them defeat the Muslims in the Crusades. And thus the legend of Prester John was born.*

*Around two decades later, an anonymous European writer adopted the persona of Prester John and wrote a humorous letter describing his marvellous kingdom. This work was widely read in the Middle Ages, and survives in many different versions, as discussed in Appendix 2. Section 1 ends with Pope Alexander III's letter to Prester John chastising him for his arrogance.*

***De Adventu Patriarchae Indorum ad Urbem sub Calisto Papa IIo***

*Date:* Mid. 12th C. (?)

**1.** Temporibus antiquis consuetudo fuisse legitur rerun bonarum studia memoriae commendari atque litteris redacta manifeste offerri quia nichil tam bene factum aut tam eleganter actum esse poterat, quin, nisi postea [in humano sensu] enarratum vel ostensum placeret proximo, pro nichilo computaretur. **2.** Nam quid proderit, si virtus, hominibus profutura, tecta lateret et multis per exemplum valitura manifesta non enitesceret? Claritas enim lapidis, tenebris obducta, nisi cessantibus tenebris patefiat, obscura manebit. **3.** Unde arduum aggredientes, licet indigni videamur, tamen, ne per incuriam posteros

laterent, ea quae de apostolo Thoma valde miranda nostris temporibus Romae recitata sunt, [memoriae deputanda] posteris significare curavimus.

**4.** Temporibus itaque Calisti papae secundi, anno vero papatus eius quarto, [qui est annus dominicae incarnationis millesimus centesimus vicesimus secundus (1122)] res novis annalibus memoranda Romanae patriae contigisse sciatur.

**5.** Sane patriarcha Indorum Romam adveniens, illius scilicet Indiae, quae ultima finem mundi facit, adventu suo Romanae curiae et universae fere Italiae stupendum miraculum fecit, cum per innumerorum curricula annorum inde huc aliquis non advenisset, nec de tam longinquis partibus et barbaris regionibus per totam Italiam paene visus umquam fuisset praeter istum supradictum beatae vitae patriarcham Iohannem. **6.** Causam vero adventus eius si quis scire desiderat, hanc fuisse cognoscat. **7.** Mortuo praedecessore suo, felicis memoriae Indorum patriarcha, congregati sunt aequanimiter universi Indi, atque eum invitum ac diutissime renitentem qualem oportuit tandem elegerunt antistitem. **8.** Data itaque sacri loci per eleccionem tandem custodia huic praedicto patriarchae Iohanni, coepit diligenter inquirere, qualiter Bizantium, sicut racio exigebat, ad suscipiendum pallium et cetera confirmationis atque dignitatis insignia quandoque veniret.

**9.** Deo igitur propicio unius anni spacio ad locum destinatum tam longae viae fatigabundus advenit. **10.** Ubi, sicut regiae dignitatis mos est, aliquamdiu demoratus, ad Romanorum legatorum noticiam usque pervenit, quos videlicet praefatus papa Calistus pro utilitate mutuae pacis atque concordiae Romani et Graii regum Constantinopolim legaverat. **11.** Quorum lingua cum praenominato Iohanni, Indorum patriarchae, nimis esset obscura, quod neque ipse, quid Romani dicerent, neque Romani quid ipse diceret intelligerent, interprete interposito, quem Achivi drogomanum vocant, de mutuo statu Romanorum et Indicae regionis ad invicem exquirere coeperunt. **12.** Ubi vero alternatim de varietate et esse Italicorum sufficienter exquisitum est, et intellexerat ille, secundum Deum atque saeculi dignitatem Christo disponente tocius orbis Romam caput esse, Romanos instanter orare curavit, ut se ipsum secum Romam ducerent, quae sibi illic significata fuerant Romae praesentialiter visurum et unde venerat Indis quandoque forsitan renunciaturum. **13** Quod Romani etiam non recusaverunt, sed, compositis pro quibus missi fuerant, itinere inito cum eo pariter profecti sunt.

**14.** Dein de nimia spaciosi tramitis laboratione Romanis moenibus demum applicuerunt. **15.** Postquam advenit ac promissorum veritatem cognovit, vehementer exultare atque Deum collaudare, qui se tanta visione dignum fecerat, prae gaudio visus est. **16.** Cognitis itaque

diligenter Romanae urbis usibus, pro quibus solis cognoscendis Romam advenerat, qui se ad talia scienda perduxerat Deo omnipotenti gracias agebat. **17.** Posthaec autem de suae Indicae regionis memorabilibus rebus, Romanis incognitis, sed maxime de sacratissimi Thomae apostoli miraculis, quae ibidem de ipso post suae humanae carnis exitum rutilaverunt et adhuc rutilant, a clero et a populo frequenti allocutione interrogatur. **18.** Quadam itaque die cleri et populi in palacio Lateranensi non parva facta est congregatio ante praesentiam Romani pontificis Calisti papae secundi. Ubi eodem praesente atque iubente et pleraque curia sua, praedictus Indorum patriarcha per interpretem de patria sua ita enarrare coepit.

**19.** ‘Civitas, cui Domino donante praesumus, Hulna vocatur, quae quidem Indici regni caput est atque dominatrix. **20.** Cuius magnitudo quatuor dierum itinere per circuitum lata extenditur. **21.** Moenium vero, intra quae sita est, talis extat grossitudo, quod super eam duo Romanorum curruum, iuncti pariter, largiter irent. **22.** Altitudinis autem tanta est proceritas, ut ad comparationem celsarum Romanarum turrium diffusa videatur. **23.** Per medium cuius Physon, unus de paradisi fluminibus, limpidissimis emanat aquis, aurum preciosissimum atque gemmas preciosissimas foras emittens, unde Indicae regiones opulentissimae fiunt. **24.** A fidelissimis autem christianis universa interius plenissime est habitata. **25.** Inter quos nullus erroneus aut infidelis, sicut historia narrat, aliquando conversari potest, quin aut facile resipiscat vel inopinato casu moribundus corruat.

**26.** Paululum vero extra urbis moenia mons separatus est, profundissimi lacus aquis undique septus, ab aquis autem porrectus in altum, in cuius summitate beatissimi Thomae apostoli mater ecclesia posita constat. **27.** In circuitu vero eiusdem lacus de foris in honore duodecim apostolorum duodecim monasteria condita sunt, quorum coenobitae per singulos dies sacra mysteria Christi sunt celebrantes ac debita domino ibi sine cessatione persolventes certis temporibus officia, tantoque domino cariores, quanto pro ejus amore laboriosiores existunt. **28.** Praedictus quidem mons, ubi Thomae apostoli sita est ecclesia, infra annum nulli hominum accessibilis est, neque illum adire aliquis temere audet, sed patriarcha, quicumque fuerit, ad celebranda sacra mysteria locum et ecclesiam istam non nisi semel in anno cum circumquaque venientibus populis ingreditur. **29.** Namque apostolicae festivitatis appropinquante die, octo diebus ante illam totidemque post illam, habundantia illa aquarum montem praedictum circueuntium ita tota decrescit, quod fere an ibi aqua fuerit non facile discernatur, unde ibi undique concursus fit populorum, fidelium ac infidelium, de longe venientium, atque omnium male habentium, languorum suorum remedia et curaciones beati Thomae apostoli meritis indubitanter

expectancium.

**30.** Est enim intra sancta sanctorum illius praedictae ecclesiae ciborium mirifice elaboratum, auro argentoque contextum et preciosissimis, quales ibidem paradisi fluvius nomine Physon emittit, variis lapidibus decoratum. **31.** Intra quod preciosissima concha argentea, sicut et ipsa historia apostoli narrat, argenteis dependet cathenis, cara quidem metallo sed pocior thesauro intra se reposito. **32.** sane in ea veluti depositionis die ita adhuc sacrum apostoli corpus integrum et illaesum conservator. **33.** stans etiam et erectus super eam tamquam vivens cernitur, ante cuius praesenciam aurea lampas balsamo plena argenteis restibus pendet. **34.** Quae ubi fuerit accensa, ab anno in annum nec balsamum diminutum nec ipsa extincta reperitur. **35.** sed talia Deo volente et apostolo intercedente in anno futuro inveniuntur, quemadmodum maiora miracula ex illius liquoris unccione prosecutura postea protestantur.

**36.** Plane, ut praedictum est, secundum consuetudinem diei festi patriarcha redeunte per singulos annos ad praedictam ecclesiam, post eum fit maximus concursus populorum, virorum ac mulierum, unanimiter clamantium et indeficientibus vocibus postulantium balsami ante tribunal apostoli ardentis qualemcumque particulam. **37.** Nimirum cuiuscumque invalitudinis aeger, si ex eo unctus fuerit, quin statim deo volente nulli dubium sanus fiat. **38.** deinde ad praedictam concham expendendam cum suis suffraganeis episcopis patriarcha velut in sacris paschalibus sollempnitatibus praeparat sese, et post haec cum ymnis et specialibus laudibus paulatim expendunt cum sacro corpore concham et cum multo tremore magnaque reverencia sacrum apostoli corpus suscipientes, in aurea iuxta altare illud collocant sede.

**39.** Cuius adhuc figura et integritas per voluntatem creatoris talis permanet, qualis fuerat, dum vivens per mundum incederet. **40.** Facies vero eius tamquam sidus rutilat, capillos habens rubeos et usque in humeros fere extentos, barbam vero rufam, crispam sed non prolixam, universam quoque formam visu pulcherrimam; vestium quoque duriciam atque integritatem eandem adhuc fore, quae fuerat, cum prius eas indutus est.

**41.** Taliter igitur deposito atque in cathedra apostoli corpore collocato, continuo sacri ministri Dei festo pertinencia ineunt officia. **42.** sed ubi eucharistiae percipiendae tempus advenerit, sanctificatas in altari hostias patriarcha in aurea patena componit et magna cum reverencia ad locum, ubi apostolus sedet, eas defert, atque inclinatis genibus apostolo ipsas offert. **43.** Ipse autem per dispensationem creatoris extensa manu dextera ita provide suscipit eas, ut non mortuus sed omnino vivens esse credatur. susceptas etiam in palma extensa conservat, singulas singulis largiturus. **44.** Universus namque fidelium populus, virorum ac mulierum, cum multa reverencia atque

formidine unus post alterum accedens singulas singuli hostias de manu apostoli ore sumunt, apostolo porrigente.

**45.** Si quis vero infidelis vel erroneus seu alia peccati macula infectus communicandus accesserit, ipso quidem praesente videntibus cunctis statim cum hostia apostolus manum retrahit et claudit, nec quamdiu ipse praesens fuerit eam aperit. **46.** Peccator autem ille numquam evadet, quin aut statim tunc resipiscat et, penitencia ductus, ab apostolo communionem sumat aut antequam locum exeat moriatur. **47.** Quod plerique infidelium aspicientes, tanti miraculi formidine territi relicto suae paganitatis errore mox ad fidem Christi convertuntur, et sanctificationis undam incessanter poscentes in nomine sanctae et individuae trinitatis unanimiter baptizantur.

**48.** His ita compositis atque tota illa ebdomada sancti apostoli Thomae festivitati pertinentibus a clero et a populo sacris mysteriis celebratis, patriarcha cum praedictis Dei ministris, archiepiscopis et episcopis, sicut quando illud expendunt, magno cum tremore ac veneracione unde sancti apostoli corpus deposuerunt ibidem tremebundi reponunt. **49.** Post haec unusquisque in sua gaudens et exultans tantis visis miraculis regreditur laetabundus. **50.** Tota vero illa planicies lacus, quae ad festum sancti Thomae, populo catervatim ingrediente, penitus arescit, eodem recedente uberrimis atque profundissimis aquis statim repletur, et in pristinum statum celerrime recurrit.

**51.** Talia Indorum patriarcha in curia Lateranensi recitante, Calistus papa secundus cum cetera Romana ecclesia, quae illic aderat, elevatis in coelum manibus Christum aequanimiter glorificaverunt, quia talia tantaque miracula per sanctum suum apostolum Thomam annuis temporibus operari non desinit, cum patre et almo spiritu vivens per infinita saecula saeculorum. Amen.

### *On the Arrival of the Patriarch of the Indians to the City of Rome in the time of Pope Calixtus II*

*Date:* Mid. 12th C. (?)

*[This anonymous text was first uncovered by Friedrich Zarncke in the 1870s, and it has since become a part of the Prester John canon. The text dates to the first half of the twelfth century, and deals with the journey of a mysterious traveller by the name of John from 'India' to Rome, where he describes the marvels of his oriental homeland before Pope Calixtus II, which culminates in a description of the annual revivification of the interred body of St Thomas in India. This event is also described by the second text in this book, the letter of Odo of Rheims.]*

In ancient times, the custom is read to have been that studies of good events were to be committed to memory and plainly presented in the written word, because anything made so well or done so elegantly will be reckoned as nothing, unless afterwards a description or explanation pleases the next man. For what will it benefit if virtue, advantageous to men, lay hidden and did not shine through by strong, clear example? Indeed, the clarity of a gemstone, covered over by darkness, will remain hidden unless it is revealed once the darkness has been lifted. From here, undertaking a difficult task, although we seem unworthy, we have nevertheless taken care to communicate to future men those very amazing things which were told about the apostle Thomas in our time at Rome, lest they lay hidden for future generations through carelessness.

So, at the time of Pope Calixtus the Second, specifically in the fourth year of his papacy [i.e. 1122], may you know that something worthy of being remembered in new annals took place in the Roman fatherland.

Truly, when the patriarch of the Indians arrived in Rome, specifically of that India which makes up the farthest end of the world, with his coming he performed a miracle for the Roman court and almost all of Italy to wonder at, since no one had come here from that place through the course of innumerable years, nor had anybody from such distant lands and barbarous regions ever been seen throughout almost all of Italy besides this aforesaid Patriarch John of blessed life. indeed, if anyone wishes to know the reason for his visit, may he know that it was this: with the death of his predecessor, the Patriarch of the Indians of happy memory, all the Indians were calmly brought together, and they eventually elected him high-priest although he was unwilling and for a long time resistant, as is proper. Then, after the custody of the holy place had finally been given by election to this aforesaid Patriarch John, he began to diligently inquire about how he might at some time come to Byzantium, as procedure demanded, in order to receive the pallium and the other insignia of confirmation and rank.

Then, with God’s favour, after the space of a year, he arrived at his destination greatly fatigued from such a long journey. While delaying there a while, as is the habit of the royal rank, he came to the attention of the Roman legates, whom the aforementioned Pope Calixtus had sent to Constantinople for the benefit of mutual peace and friendship between the Roman and Greek kings. Their conversation with the aforenamed John, Patriarch of the Indians, was extremely unclear, because neither did he understand what the Romans were saying, nor did the Romans understand what he was saying, but, with the introduction of an interpreter, which the Greeks

call a ‘dragoman’, they began to question each other on the respective condition of the Romans and of the Indian region. When in turn the variety and nature of the Italians had been sufficiently inquired into, and he had realised that, according to God and the dignity of the age, Rome was the head of the entire world, with Christ arranging it, he immediately undertook to entreat the Romans to take him with them to Rome so that he could see with his own eyes those things in Rome which they had described to him, and perhaps, when possible, report back to the Indians whence he had come. Indeed, the Romans did not refuse this, but, having settled the matters for which they had been sent, they set out to start the journey together with him.

Then, after so much effort because of the distance of the trek, they finally reached the walls of Rome. After he arrived and learned the truth of the promises, he was seen to jump for joy excitedly and to praise God, who had made him worthy of such a great sight. Then, after having thoroughly learnt the customs of the city of Rome, for which knowledge alone he had come to Rome, he gave thanks to God Almighty. But after this, he was interrogated by the clergy and the people with frequent questions about the remarkable affairs of his Indian region, which the Romans were ignorant of, but especially about the miracles of the most sacred apostle Thomas, which glowed from him there after the departure of his human flesh and glow there until now. Then on a certain day, a by no means small group of clergymen and laypeople congregated in the Lateran Palace in the presence of the Roman pontiff, Pope Calixtus the Second. There, with the pope and his court present and commanding it, the aforesaid patriarch of the Indians, [speaking] through an interpreter, began to describe his native land thus:

‘The city which we are in charge of, by the Lord’s grant, is called Hulna; indeed, it is the head and mistress of the Indian kingdom. It is as large as four days’ journey from side to side. Truly, the thickness of the walls in which the city sits is such that two Roman chariots joined together can easily ride upon them. And so great is the height that it seems tall compared to the loftiness of Roman towers. Through the middle of the city, the Physon, one of the rivers of paradise,[1] flows with the clearest waters, sending forth most precious gold and most precious jewels from which the Indian regions are made most wealthy. And within, the entire [city] is completely inhabited by the most faithful Christians. Amongst these, no wicked or faithless man can ever dwell, as history relates,[2] without quickly coming to his senses or collapsing dead in an unforeseen end.

‘Truly, there is a mountain a little way from the walls of the city, which is surrounded on all sides by the waters of a deepest lake, and which extends from the waters to the sky, on the summit of which is

placed the mother church of the blessed apostle Thomas. Truly, on the edge of this same lake twelve monasteries were founded in honour of the twelve apostles, whose monks, beloved by the Lord as much as they work for His love, celebrate the sacred mysteries of Christ every day and pay their debts to the Lord there without cessation, performing their duties at the appointed times. indeed, the aforesaid mountain, where the church of Thomas the apostle sits, is accessible to no man throughout the year, nor does anyone rashly dare to approach it except the patriarch, whoever he is [at the time], who only enters this church once a year to celebrate the sacred mysteries, when he is surrounded by the approaching people. in fact, with the day of the apostolic feast approaching, for eight days beforehand and as many afterwards, that whole abundance of waters encircling the aforesaid mountain decreases, so that it is not easily discerned whether there was ever water there; then there comes together on all sides a congregation of people, the faithful and the unfaithful, some coming from a long way away, suffering all kinds of sicknesses, expecting without doubt to receive remedies for their infirmities and cures from the blessed apostle Thomas.

'In fact, within the holy of holies of this aforesaid church is a *ciborium*[3] of wonderful workmanship, interwoven with gold and silver and decorated with various most precious stones of the sort which the river of paradise named the Physon deposits there. Within this *ciborium* is a most precious silver shell hanging from silver chains, as that history of the apostle also tells;[4] but although it is placed in valuable metal, the greater treasure is within it. inside it, the holy body of the apostle is preserved to this day whole and unharmed as though on the day of its burial. The body is seen standing erect above the shell as though living, and a golden lamp full of balsam hangs by ropes of silver in front of it. From the preceding year, when this lamp was lit, until the current year, it is found with neither the balsam diminished nor the lamp extinguished. But by the will of God and the intervention of the apostle, these things are still found there the next time, although the greater miracles of this liquid ointment are about to be described below.

'Certainly, as has been said above, according to the custom of the festival day, when the patriarch returns every year to the aforesaid church the greatest gathering of peoples follows him, men and women shouting out as one and demanding with unfailing voices in front of the glowing apostle's platform a small portion of the balsam. Of course, if anyone weak from illness is anointed with this ointment, by the will of God he immediately becomes completely healthy. Then the patriarch prepares himself with his supporting bishops for the weighing of the aforesaid shell, as though on the sacred ceremonies of

Easter; and after this, with hymns and every praise, they weigh the shell with the sacred body little by little, and, taking up the sacred body of the apostle with much trembling and great reverence, they place it in a golden seat next to the altar.

'His body's form and integrity endure until now, through the will of the creator, in the same condition as when he used to walk through the world living. Truly, his face glows like a star, with red hair extending almost to the shoulders, a red beard, curly but not long, and an entire figure most handsome in appearance, as well as clothes whose substance and integrity remains as when he was first dressed in them.

'So, after the body is placed in this way and positioned on the apostle's throne, with the festival of the holy ministry of God continuing, they begin the relevant duties. Then when the time comes to administer the Eucharist, the patriarch gathers together the holy offerings in the golden pan on the altar, carries them with great reverence to the place where the apostle sits, and offers them to the apostle on bended knee. But then, by the arrangement of the creator, the apostle takes them up with his right hand outstretched prophetically, so that he is believed to be not dead but altogether alive. He then keeps them in his open palm, giving one to each person. In fact, each of the faithful, men and women, approaching one after the other with great reverence and awe, receive in their mouths the offerings from the outstretched hand of the apostle.

'Truly, if any faithless or wicked man approaches, or anyone corrupted by the pollution of sin, with such a man present, the apostle, seeing all things, immediately withdraws his hand with the offerings and closes it, and he does not bring it back out as long as the man is present. Moreover, that sinner will never escape; either he comes to his senses right then and there and, led by penitence, accepts communion from the apostle, or dies shortly after departing that place. seeing this, the majority of the unfaithful, out of great fear of such a miracle, are quickly converted to the faith of Christ, and after letting go of the error of their paganism and incessantly demanding a wave of sanctification, they are all baptised in the name of the holy and undivided trinity.

'So, after these things have taken place, with the festival of the holy apostle Thomas stretching out for a whole week, after the clergy and laypeople have celebrated the sacred mysteries, the patriarch and the aforesaid ministers of God, the archbishops and bishops, take the body of the holy apostle down from that place with a great shudder and reverence, as when they weigh it, and, trembling, they restore it to its place. After this, each man returns cheerfully, rejoicing within himself and revelling at having seen such great miracles. Truly, the

entire surface of that lake, which dries up completely when the people walk en masse to the festival of St Thomas, is immediately filled again with the most copious and deepest waters when the people depart, and quickly returns to its former state'.

When the patriarch of the Indians had finished reporting such things in the Lateran court, Pope Calixtus the Second, who was there with the rest of the Roman assembly, calmly glorified Christ, with their hands raised to heaven, because so excellent and so great a miracle did not cease to be performed through his holiness the apostle Thomas every year, with the father and the holy spirit living forever and ever. Amen.

**Domni Oddonis Abbatis Sancti Remigii, *Epistola ad Thomam comitem de quodam miraculo Sancti Thomae Apostoli***

*Date:* Mid. 12th C. (?)

**1.** Salutare est omnibus christiani nominis cultoribus semper quaerere et audire aliquid aedificativum et, quantum sit dominus in sanctis suis mirabilis, cognoscere relatione fidelium. **2.** Cum enim te avidum super hoc cognoverim, iuxta petitionis tuae ammonitionem, quae in curia Romana vidi et audivi, scripto tibi intimare volui. **3.** Aderam anno praesenti, feria scilicet sexta post dominicae ascensionis sollemnitatem, ante domni papae praesentiam, de nostris videlicet negotiis locuturus, cum subito affuit quidam, qui legatos Byzantei, id est Constantinopolitani, imperatoris adesse pro foribus nuntiaret. **4.** Exhilaratus vero domnus papa super tanti nominis legatis, ex latere suo episcopum misit, ut eos honorifice introduceret sibique praesentaret. **5.** Veniunt salutatoque papa universali et plerisque curialibus, de salute imperatoris suorumque qualitate, prout fuerant sciscitati, satis honeste retulerunt.

**6.** Causa autem eorum haec fuit. Intererat cum eis Indiae archiepiscopus, vir satis honestae formae et iuxta linguae suae notitiam eloquentissimus, qui, sociali adiutorio defuncti sui principis destitutus, consilii causa ad praedictum imperatorem iampridem venerat. **7.** Cumque imperator petitionem eius audisset et ex familiaribus suis unum principem dedisset, quasi perfecto negotio ad propria redire disposuit. **8.** Cumque iter ageret, novum principem morte impediente amisit. Quo tumulato, imperatorem repetiit, doloris sui causam nuntiaturus. **9.** Imperator vero consolatus eum, ne doleret ammonuit; principem recepit alterum imperatoris munificentia. **10.** Tunc archiepiscopus aliquantulum mitigato dolore agit iter sed non peragit. Repentinus enim secundi interitus principis duplicato dolore

vehementer eum turbavit.

**11.** Quid ageret, ignorabat: incertum quippe habebat, an imperatorem repeteret an incoeptum iter imperfecta negotio peragere deberet. **12.** Vicit tandem virilis consilii strenuitas imminentis periculi iacturam, suorumque exhortationibus relevatus et ne desperaret ammonitus, retrogradum iter arripuit seque pii imperatoris oculis divi infortunii baiulus repraesentavit. **13.** Cognito igitur imperator inopinatae rei eventu obstupuit, et petitioni archiepiscopi satisfecisse se dicens, tertium mittere denegavit. **14.** Humilis autem archiepiscopus vix multis lacrimis impetravit, ut Romanam curiam ei visitare consilii gratia liceret et legatos imperatoris cum litteris deprecatoriis secum ducere valeret.

**15.** Cumque in curia esset, quibusdam palatinis praeesse se ecclesiae illi referebat, in qua beati apostoli Thomae corpus requiescere dicebatur. **16.** Inter cetera vero, quae de situ ecclesiae thesaurorumque opulentia et ornamentorum varietate enarravit, unum disseruit, quod non sine ammiratione aures audientium capere possunt. **17.** Praedicti apostoli ecclesia magnae altitudinis fluvio ex omni parte clauditur, qui, discurrentibus aquis, septenni etiam puerulo octo ante festivitatem apostoli diebus totidemque post festivitatem prae nimia siccitate se viabilem praebet. **18.** In ipsa autem sollemni die collectis in unum totius provinciae proceribus omnique clero et populo, post multas lacrimas altaque suspiria archiepiscopus cum sui sociis ordinis ad beati apostoli feretrum accedit et ex eo cum magna reverentia corpus levatum in cathedra pontificali decenter collocat, primusque tanti advocati pedibus advolutus, oblationis suae munere apostolum honorat. **19.** Beatus vero apostolus brachium erigit manumque aperit: et quicquid ei ab universis nostrae fidei cultoribus offertur, gratanter accipit. **20.** Si quis vero haereticus, populo admixtus, quasi pro devotione in manu apostoli aliquid ponere nititur, claudit sanctus manum, et nefanda munera accipere denegat.

**21.** Cumque talia relatione quorundam in auribus domini papae sonuissent, adesse iussit episcopum, et ne amplius in palatio falsa seminaret, sub anathemate prohibere voluit. Veritati enim contrarium esse videbatur, quod de apostolo divulgasset. **22.** Episcopus autem coram omnibus nil esse verius affirmabat, et assensu domini papae sacrosancti evangelii iuramento ita esse comprobavit. **23.** Credidit tandem dominus papa, credidit et omnis curia et apud omnipotentiam divinam apostolum maiora impetrare posse acclamabant.

**Odo, Lord Abbot of Rheims, *Letter to Count Thomas on a certain Miracle of St Thomas the Apostle***

*Date:* Mid. 12th C. (?)

*[Odo was abbot of Saint-Remi in Rheims from 1118–51. He claims to have been present when the mysterious John arrived in Rome and gave his narrations to Pope Calixtus II, as described also in the previous text. The* De Adventu *and this letter narrate the same event, but seem to be textually unrelated, which suggests that John's visit to Rome was a real occurrence, though little more can be said without dangerous excursions into speculation. This correspondence between Odo and Thomas (the letter's recipient) shows that John's visit increased European interest in eastern wonders. Later, when the metamorphosed news of a tremendous battle in Central Asia (the Battle of Qatwan) came to European ears, this evoked the memory of John, and thus the legend of Prester John was born.]*

It is useful for all worshippers of the Christian name to always inquire after and hear what has taken place, and to learn through the relation of faithful men how wondrous the Lord is in his saints. For when I learnt through the reminder of your letter that you were eager to learn of these things that I saw and heard in the Roman curia, I wanted to tell you about them in writing. I was in attendance in the present year, namely on the sixth day of the week after the observance of the Lord's ascension, in the presence of the lord pope; in fact, I was about to discuss our business, when suddenly there appeared a man who announced that legates of the emperor of the Byzantines (that is, the Constantinopolitans) had arrived at the gates. Excited about legates of such a great name, the lord pope sent a bishop from his side to honourably bring them in and present them to him. They came and, having greeted the universal pope and most of the members of the court, they reported honestly enough on the health and state of the emperor and his men, just as they had been asked.

But their motive was this: The archbishop of India was present with them, a man of honest enough character and most articulate in the knowledge of his tongue. Having lost his now-deceased prince, with the help of allies he had long ago come to the aforesaid emperor for the sake of counsel. And when the emperor had heard his petition and given over a prince from his household, the archbishop arranged to return to his own lands as though the negotiations had been finished. But when he set out on his journey, he lost the new prince to troublesome death. With that man buried, he returned to the emperor to announce the reason for his grief. The emperor convinced him not to grieve and, through his generosity, advised him to take another prince. Then, after a little of his grief was soothed, the archbishop set out on his journey. He did not, however, complete it, for the sudden death of the second prince greatly agitated him with a double grief.

He didn't know what to do! Naturally, he was uncertain whether he should return to the emperor or complete the uncommenced journey and leave the business unresolved. Eventually, the benefit of mature advice outweighed the threat of imminent danger, and, relieved by the exhortations of his men and advised not to despair, he took up the return journey and presented himself a messenger of divine misfortune to the eyes of the pious emperor. When the emperor learnt of the unexpected occurrence, he was astounded, and refused to send a third prince, saying that he had already satisfied the archbishop's request. But the humble archbishop entreated, with scarcely any tears, that he be allowed to visit the Roman court for the sake of counsel, and that he might take with him legates of the emperor with letters of entreaty.

And when he was in the [Roman] court, he reported to certain Roman officials that he was the head of that church in which the body of the blessed apostle Thomas was said to rest. Truly, amongst the other things that he described concerning the site of the church, its wealth of treasures, and the variety of its decorations, he discussed one thing that cannot reach the ears of its hearers without causing astonishment. The church of the aforesaid apostle is enclosed on all sides by a river of great depth, which reveals a path to itself to a seven year old boy when the waters recede as a result of excessive drought eight days before the apostle's festival and for as many after the festival. On that solemn day, with the nobles of all the province and all the clergy and laypeople collected into one, after many tears and deep breaths, the archbishop approaches the blessed apostle's bier with the companions of his order and gracefully positions the raised body on the pontifical throne, and having first prostrated himself, he honours the apostle through the gift of his offering. Truly, the blessed apostle raises his arm and opens his hand; and he gratefully accepts whatever is offered to him by all the worshippers of our faith. If any heretic, mixed with the people, advances to place something in the hand of the apostle as though out of devotion, the saint closes his hand, and refuses to accept the wicked offerings.

And when such things had been heard in the ears of the lord pope through the relation of certain men, he ordered the bishop to be present, and lest he sow greater falsehoods in the palace, he wanted to restrain him under excommunication. For indeed, what had been said about the apostle seemed to be contrary to the truth. But in the presence of everyone, the bishop asserted that he was but truthful, and he proved to be thus through the taking of an oath on the sacrosanct Gospel, with the lord pope approving it. In the end, the lord pope believed, and all the court believed as well, and they shouted out in the presence of divine omnipotence that the apostle

was able to achieve great things.

**Otto of Freising, *De Duabus Civitatibus***

*Date:* 1157

*Liber 7, Capitulum 33*

Vidimus etiam ibi [in Viterbo, in praesentia papae Eugenii Tercii] tunc [in anno 1145] pretaxatum de Syria Gabulensem episcopum [id est Hugo], [qui narrabat de statu terrae sanctae, de expugnatione Edissae, etc.]

Narrabat etiam, quod ante non multos annos Iohannes quidam, qui ultra Persidem et Armeniam in extremo oriente habitans rex et sacerdos cum gente sua Christianus est, sed Nestorianus, Persarum et Medorum reges fratres, Samiardos[5] dictos, bello petierit atque Ebactani, cuius supra mentio habita est, sedem regni eorum expugnaverit. Cui dum prefati reges cum Persarum, Medorum, Assyriorum copiis occurrerent, triduo utrisque mori magis quam fugere volentibus, dimicatum est. Presbyter Iohannes – sic enim eum nominare solent – tandem versis in fugam Persis cruentissima cede victor extitit. Post hanc victoriam dicebat predictum Iohannem ad auxilium Hierosolimitanae ecclesiae procinctum movisse, sed, dum ad Tygrim venisset ibique nullo vehiculo traducere exercitum potuisset, ad septentrionalem plagam, ubi eundem amnem hiemali glacie congelari didicerat, iter flexisse. Ibi dum per aliquot annos moratus gelu exspectaret, sed minime hoc impediente aeris temperie obtineret, multos ex insueto caelo de exercitu amittens ad propria redire compulsus est. Fertur enim iste de antiqua progenie illorum, quorum in Evangelio mentio fit, esse magorum eisdemque, quibus et illi, gentibus imperans tanta gloria et habundantia frui, ut non nisi sceptro smaragdino uti dicatur. Patrum itaque suorum, qui in cunabulis Christum adorare venerunt, accensus exemplo Hierosolimam ire proposuerat, sed pretaxata causa impeditum fuisse asserunt. Sed hec hactenus…

**Otto of Freising, *Of the Two Cities***

*Date:* 1157

*[This chronicle by the respected Otto, Bishop of Freising, contains the first mention of Prester John under that name. Otto participated in the disastrous Second Crusade and was lucky to escape with his life.*

*Interestingly, Otto was perhaps sceptical about Prester John from the outset, judging by the final words 'but enough of this', which may indicate either scepticism or a simple change in subject matter. Indeed, unlike many of his contemporaries who narrated various tales of marvels in their historical works, the Prester John story is almost out of place in Otto's otherwise prosaic history. In either case, Otto was only reporting the story as had been told by Hugh of Jabala to Pope Eugenius III while Otto himself was present.*]

*Book 7, Chapter 33*

In addition, we saw at that time and place [in 1145, in Viterbo, in the presence of Pope Eugenius III] the aforesaid Bishop of Jabala from Syria, [Hugh],[6] [who reported about the state of the Holy Land, the destruction of Edessa, and so on].

He also reported that, not many years ago, a certain John, king and priest, who lives beyond Persia and Armenia in the furthest east, and who, with his people, is a Christian, though Nestorian, made war on the brother kings of the Persians and Medes, called the Samiards, and stormed Ebactana, the seat of their kingdom, of which mention was made above.[7] While these kings were resisting him with a great abundance of Persians, Medes and Assyrians, a battle raged for three days, both sides preferring to die than to flee. Prester John, as indeed they are accustomed to call him, finally emerged the victor in a most bloody slaughter after the Persians had turned to flight. It was said that after this victory the aforesaid John prepared to move to the aid of the church in Jerusalem, but when he came to the Tigris, he was unable to bring his army to cross it by any means, so he turned his road towards the north, where he had learned that the same river was frozen over with wintry ice. Then he waited for several years delayed by the frost, but because of the continuation of bad weather, he was unable to cross, and, losing many of his army to the unkind weather, he was compelled to return to his own lands. Indeed, that man is said to be of the ancient race of the magi, of whom mention is made in the Gospel, and he is said to enjoy such great glory and riches that he does not command his people except with an emerald sceptre. And so, enflamed by the example of his forefathers who came to adore Christ in the manger, he proposed to go to Jerusalem, but they allege that he was impeded by the aforesaid cause. But enough of this…

***Epistola Presbiteri Iohannis***

*Date:* c.1165–70 (for Uninterpolated Version)[8]

*Uninterpolated*

**1.** Presbiter Iohannes, potentia et virtute Dei et domini nostri Iesu Christi dominus dominantium, Emanueli, Romeon gubernatori salute gaudere et gratia ditandi ad ulteriora transire. **2.** Nuntiabatur apud maiestatem nostram, quod diligebas excellentiam nostram et mentio altitudinis nostrae erat apud te. Sed per apocrisiarium nostrum cognovimus, quod quaedam ludicra et iocunda volebas nobis mittere, unde delectaretur iusticia nostra. **3.** Etenim si homo sum, pro bono habeo, et de nostris per apocrisiarium nostrum tibi aliqua transmittimus, quia scire volumus et desideramus, si nobiscum rectam fidem habes et si per omnia credis in domino nostro Iesu Christo. **4.** Cum enim hominem nos esse cognoscamus, te Graeculi tui Deum esse existimant, cum te mortalem et humanae corruptioni subiacere cognoscamus. **5.** De consueta largitatis nostrae munificentia, si aliquorum, quae ad gaudia pertinent, habes indigentiam, per apocrisiarium nostrum et per scedulam dilectionis tuae nos certifica et impetrabis. **6.** Accipe ierarcham in nomine nostro et utere tibi, quia libenter utimur lechito tuo, ut sic confortemus et corroboremus virtutem nostram ad invicem. Tigna quoque nostrum respice et considera. **7.** Quodsi ad dominationem nostram venire volueris, maiorem et digniorem domus nostrae te constituemus, et poteris frui habundantia nostra, et ex his, quae apud nos habundant, si redire volueris, locupletatus redibis. **8.** Memorare novissima tua et in aeternum non peccabis.

**9.** Si vero vis cognoscere magnitudinem et excellentiam nostrae celsitudinis et in quibus terris dominetur potentia nostra, intellige et sine dubitatione crede, quia ego, presbiter Iohannes, dominus sum dominantium et praecello in omnibus divitiis, quae sub caelo sunt, virtute et potentia omnes reges universae terrae. Septuaginta duo reges nobis tributarii sunt. **10.** Devotus sum christianus, et ubique pauperes christianos, quos clementiae nostrae regit imperium, defendimus et elemosinis nostris sustentamus. **11.** In voto habemus visitare sepulchrum domini cum maximo exercitu, prout decet gloriam maiestatis nostrae humiliare et debellare inimicos crucis Christi et nomen eius benedictum exaltare.

**12.** In tribus Indiis dominatur magnificentia nostra, et transit terra nostra ab ulteriore India, in qua corpus sancti Thomae apostoli requiescit, per desertum et progreditur ad solis ortum, et redit per declivum in Babilonem desertam iuxta turrim Babel. **13.** Septuaginta duae provinciae serviunt nobis, quarum paucae sunt christianorum, et unaquaeque habet regem per se, qui omnes sunt nobis tributarii. **14.** In terra nostra oriuntur et nutriuntur elephantes, dromedarii, cameli, ypotami, cocodrilli, methagallinarii, cametheternis, thinsiretae,

pantherae, onagri, leones albi et rubei, ursi albi, merulae albae, cicades mutae, grifones, tigres, lamiae, hienae,

*Interpolation D*

**a.** porci agrestes magni ut bubali, habentes dentes longos per cubitum unum, canes magni agrestes magnitudine equorum, quorum ferocitate omne genus ferarum superatur, quos nostri venatores nescio qua arte, qua incantatione quove ingenio, dum catuli sunt et in lecto matris, furantur et eos diligenter nutriunt et humanizant. **b.** Postquam vero sunt magni et invenatione bene docti, nostrae maiestati repraesentantur, de quibus in nostra venatione saepemille et plures habemus. **c.** Oriuntu retiam in terra nostra equi agrestes, asini agrestes, homines cornuli, boves agrestes, homines agrestes, monoculi, homines habentes oculos ante et retro, homines sine capite, habentes os et oculos in pectore, quorum longitudo est XII pedum, latitudo VI; in colore sunt similes auro purissimo; homines habentes XII pedes, VI brachia, XII manus, IIII capita, et in unoquoque habent duo ora et tres oculos. **d.** Nascuntur etiam in terra nostra mulieres, habentes corpora magna, barbas usque ad mammas, capita plana, vestitae pellibus, venatrices optimae, quae nutriunt ad venacionem bestias pro canibus, leonem contra leonem, ursum contra ursum, cervum contra cervum et sic de ceteris.

*Uninterpolated*

**14. …** boves agrestes, sagitarii, homines agrestes, homines cornuti, fauni, satiri et mulieres eiusdem generis, pigmei, cenocephali, gygantes, quorum altitudo est quadraginta cubitorum, monoculi, cyclopes et avis, quae vocatur fenix, et fere omne genus animalium, quae sub caelo sunt.

*Interpolation D*

**e.** In quibusdam aliis provinciis nostris oriuntur formicae magnitudine catulorum, habentes VI pedes et alas quasi locustae marinae, et habent dentes infra os, quibus comedunt, maiores quam canes, et dentes extra os maiores quam silvestres apri, quibus perimunt tam homines quam cetera animalia. Et illis peremptis statim eos devorant. **f.** Non est siquidem mirum, sunt enim in cursu ita veloces, ut putares sine dubio volare, ideoque in illis provinciis non habitant homines nisi in tutis et munitissimis locis. **g.** Istae namque formicae ab occasu solis usque ad terciam horam diei sunt sub terra et tota nocte fodiunt aurum purissimum et proferunt in lucem. A tercia

vero hora diei usque ad occasum solis sunt super terram et tunc comedunt. Deinde intrant sub terram ad fodiendum aurum. Et sic faciunt per singulos dies. **h.** In nocte namque descendunt homines de municionibus suis et colligunt aurum, quod elephantis, ypothamis, camelis, camethurnis et aliis bestiis magnis corpore et potentibus virtute imponunt et deferunt omni die ad aeraria nostra. In nocte laborant, arant, seminant, metunt, vadunt et veniunt, et faciunt quaecunque volunt, in die vero nullus audet apparere, donec formicae sunt super terram, et hoc fortitudine et ferocitate ipsarum formicarum.

*Interpolation C*

**15.** Habemus alias gentes, quae solummodo vescuntur carnibus tam hominum quam brutorum animalium et abortivorum, quae nunquam timent mori. Et cum ex his aliquis moritur, tam parentes eius quam extranei avidissime comedunt eum, dicentes: 'Sacratissimum est humanam carnem manducare'. **16.** Nomina quarum sunt haec: Gog et Magog, Amic, Agic, Arenar, Defar, Fontineperi, Conei, Samantae, Agrimandi, Salterei, Armei, Anofragei, Annicefelei, Tasbei, Alanei. **17.** Istas nempe et alias multas generationes Alexander puer magnus, rex Macedonum, conclusit inter altissimos montes in partibus aquilonis. Quas cum volumus ducimus super inimicos nostros et data eis licentia a maiestate nostra, quod eos devorent, continuo nullus hominum, nullum animalium remanet, quin statim devoretur. **18.** Inimicis namque devoratis, reducimus eas ad propria loca. Et ideo reducimus, quia, si absque nobis reverterentur, omnes homines et universa animalia, quae invenirent, penitus devorarent. **19.** Istae quidem pessimae generationes ante consummationem saeculi tempore Antichristi egredientur a quatuor partibus terrae et circuibunt universa castra sanctorum et civitatem magnam Romam, quam proposuimus dare filio nostro, qui primo nascetur nobis, cum universa Italia et tota Germania et utraque Gallia, cum Anglia, Britannia et Scotia; dabimus ei Hispaniam et totam terram usque ad mare coagulatum. **20.** Nec mirum, quia numerus earum est sicut harena, quae est in litore maris, quibus certe nulla gens, nullum regnum resistere poterit. Hae vero generationes, sicut quidam propheta prophetavit, propter suas abhominationes non erunt in iudicio, sed deus mittet super eas ignem de caelo, et ita consummabit eas, quod nec etiam cinis ex eis remanebit.

*Uninterpolated*

**21.** Terra nostra melle fluit lacte habundat. In aliqua terra nostra nulla venena nocent nec garrula rana coaxat, scorpio nullus ibi, nec serpens

serpit in herba. Venenata animalia non possunt habitare in eo loco nec aliquos laedere. **22.** Inter paganos per quandam provinciam nostram transit fluvius, qui vocatur Ydonus. Fluvius iste de paradiso progrediens expandit sinus suos per universam provinciam illam diversis meatibus, et ibi inveniuntur naturales lapides, smaragdi, saphiri, carbunculi, topazii, cristoliti, onichini, berilli, ametisti, sardii et plures preciosi lapides. **23.** Ibidem nascitur herba, quae vocatur assidios, cuius radicem si quis super se portaverit, spiritum immundum effugat et cogit eum dicere, quis sit et unde sit et nomen eius. Quare immundi spiritus in terra illa neminem audent invadere. **24.** In alia quadam provincia nostra universum piper nascitur et colligitur, quod in frumentum et in annonam et corium et pannos commutatur. **25.** Est autem terra illa nemorosa ad modum salicti, plena per omnia serpentibus. [*Interpolation D*: Qui sunt magni et habent duo capita et cornua velut arietes et oculos, qui lucent velud lucerna]. Sed cum piper maturescit,

*Uninterpolated*

accenduntur nemora et serpentes fugientes intrant cavernas suas, et tunc excutitur piper de arbusculis et desiccatum coquitur sed qualiter coquatur, nullus extraneus scire permittitur.

*Interpolation A*

veniunt universi populi de proximis regionibus, secum ferentes paleas, stipulas et ligna aridissima, quibus cingunt totum nemus undique, et cum ventus flaverit vehementer, ponunt ignem infra nemus et extra, ne aliquis serpens extra nemus possit exire, et sic omnes serpentes in igne fortiter accenso moriuntur praeter illos, qui suas intrant cavernas. **26.** Ecce consumpto igne viri et mulieres, parvi et magni, portantes furcas in manibus, intrant nemus et omnes serpentes assos furcis extra nemus proiciunt et ex eis densissimos acervos componunt, veluti in area fit paleis granis excussis.

*Interpolation D*

**i.** Quos quidem Indi sapientes cum quibusdam salutiferis herbis bene siccis subtiliter in molendino farinizant. Quae siquidem farina super omnes medicinas valet non valentibus generare, etiam mulieribus non valentibus concipere, et, ut generaliter et breviter loquar, valet ad omnes infirmitates, si secundum modum uniuscuiusque infirmitatis fuerit apposita vel recepta.

*Uninterpolated*

**27.** Quod nemus situm est ad radicem montis Olimpi, unde fons perspicuus oritur, omnium in se specierum saporem retinens. Variatur autem sapor per singulas horas diei et noctis, et progreditur itinere dierum trium non longe a paradyso, unde Adam fuit expulsus. **28.** Si quis de fonte illo ter ieiunus gustaverit, nullum ex illa die infirmitatem patietur, semperque erit quasi in aetate XXX duorum annorum,

quamdiu vixerit. **29.** Ibi sunt lapilli, qui vocantur midriosi, quos frequenter ad partes nostras deportare solent aquilae, per quos reiuvenescunt et lumen reciperant. **30.** Si quis illum in digito portaverit, ei lumen non deficit, et si est imminutum, restituitur et cum plus inspicitur, magis lumen acuitur. Legitimo carmine consecratus hominem reddit invisibilem, fugat odia, concordiam parat, pellit invidiam.

*Interpolation E*

**1.** In extremis mundi partibus versus meridiem habemus quandam insulam magnam et inhabitabilem, in qua dominus omni tempore bis in septimana copiosissime pluit manna, quod a populis circumhabitantibus colligitur atque comeditur, nec alio cibo vescuntur. Non enim arant, seminant, metunt, nec aliquo modo conmovent terram ad uberrimum fructum percipiendum ex ea. Sapit hoc namque manna in ore ipsorum quemadmodum sapiebat in ore filiorum Irahel in exitu de Egypto. **2.** Isti siquidem non connoscunt mulieres nisi suas uxores. Non habent invidiam neque odium, pacifice vivunt, non litigant inter se pro suo; super se non habent maiorem nisi quem miserimus pro tributo nostro recipiendo. Solvunt namque pro tributo singulis annis maiestati nostrae L elephantes et totidem ypotamo, et ipsos honeratos purissimo balsamo, et totidem honeratos lapidibus preciosis et obrizo auro. Habundant certe homines terrae illius lapidibus preciosis fulvissimoque auro. **3.** Isti homines, qui sic caelesti pane vivunt, omnes vivunt quingentis annis. Verumtamen in capite C annorum reiuvenescunt et renovantur omnes bibendo ter de quodam fonte, qui egreditur ad radicem cuiusdam arboris illo stantis, videlicet in praedicta insula. Et aqua ter sumpta seu bibita, ut ita dicam senectutem C annorum ita abiciunt et ea ita denudantur, ut sine hesitatione videantur esse in aetate XXX vel XL annorum et non amplius. Et sic semper singulis C annis reiuvenescunt et ex toto mutantur. **4.** Porro finitis D annis moriuntur et, ut est consuetudo gentis illius, non sepelliuntur set deferuntur ad praenominatam insulam et ad arbores illo stantes eriguntur, folia quorum nullo tempore decidunt et sunt densissima. Umbra quorum foliorum gratissima et earum arborum fructus odore suavissimo. Caro illorum mortuorum non pallescit, non putrescit, non umescit, non cinerescit seu pulverescit, sed sicut vivens erat recens et colorata, sic permanebit usque ad Antichristi tempora illaesa, sicut quidam propheta prophetavit. **5.** Temporibus vero Antichristi, ut sermo divinus impleatur, qui dictus est ad Adam: terra es et in terram reverteris, tunc quidem aperietur per se terra profundissime, nullo eam fodiente, et sic absorbebit eos terra. Et illis absorbtis claudetur terra, sicut prius

erat, et ita caro illorum sub terra fiet terra, et inde resurgent et venient ad iudicium iudicandi aut iudicaturi.

**6.** Est etiam versus septentrionem in ea parte, in qua mundus finitur, quidam noster locus, qui dicitur caverna draconum. Longe lateque nimia difficultate et asperitate asperimus atque difficilis, profundissima profunditate profundissimus est et multum cavernosus seu latebrosus. In quo quidem loco sunt infinita milia draconum terribilium, quos incolae illarum provinciarum circumastantium cum maxima diligencia custodiunt, ne aliqui Indorum incantatores vel aliunde venientes quemquam illorum draconum queant furari. **7.** Solent namque principes Indorum in nuptiis et in aliis conviviis suis dracones habere et sine draconibus non putant plenum convivium habere. Et sicut pastores armentorum et iumentorum pullos equorum solent humiliare et humanizare, docere atque domare, ac propriis nominibus eos vocare, frenum et sellam eis imponere et quocunque volunt equitare, sic et isti homines, qui habent custodiam et disciplinam draconum, praepositi draconum, suis incantacionibus et veneficiis eosdem dracones humiliant, humanizant, docent atque perdomant et propriis nominibus eos vocant, frenum et sellam eis imponunt et quando et quocunque volunt, equitant. **7a.** Isti populi draconum singulis annis magnificentiae nostrae solvunt pro tributo C homines, magistros draconum, et C dracones ita humanizatos, quod sunt inter homines velut oves, et cum hominibus, caput et caudam hinc et illinc deducendo, admirabiliter ludunt, sicut canes. Isti nempe homines cum draconibus sunt nostri cursores, quos, cum nostrae placet clemenciae, cum ipsis draconibus per aera volantes mittimus per universa climata mundi, scire volentes undique universa nova.

*Uninterpolated*

**31.** Inter cetera, quae mirabiliter in terra nostra contingunt, est harenosum mare sine aqua. Harena enim movetur et tumescit in undas ad similitudinem omnis maris et nunquam est tranquillum. Hoc mare neque alio modo transiri potest, et ideo cuiusmodi terra ultra sit sciri non potest. Et quamvis omnino careat aqua, inveniuntur tamen iuxta ripam a nostra parte diversa genera piscium ad comedendum gratissima et sapidissima, alibi nunquam visa. **32.** Tribus dietis longe ab hoc mari sunt montes quidam, ex quibus descendit fluvius lapidum eodem modo sine aqua, et fluit per terram nostram usque ad mare harenosum. **33.** Tribus diebus in septimana fluit et labuntur parvi et magni lapides et trahunt secum ligna usque ad mare harenosum, et postquam mare intraverit fluvius, lapides et ligna evanescunt nec ultra apparent. Nec quamdiu fluit, aliquis eum transire potest. Aliis quatuor diebus patet transitus.

*Interpolation C*

**34.** Est etiam inter mare harenosum et inter praedictos montes in planicie lapis admirandae virtutis, vim in se habens fere incredibilis medicinae. Curat enim tantum christianos vel id fieri cupientes, a quacumque detineantur infirmitate, hoc modo. **35.** Est lapis quidam cavus ad modum conchae aeneae, in quo semper est aqua in altitudine quatuor digitorum, et custoditur semper a duobus senibus, reverendae sanctitatis viris. **36.** Illi primo interrogant venientes, si Christiani sint vel fieri velint, deinde, si sanitatem toto corde desiderent. Quod quum fuerint professi, vestibus propriis exuti, intrant concham. Et si vera professi sunt, aqua inipit crescere et adeo crescit, quod cooperit ita eum totum, quod super caput eius ascendit. Idque tercio facit. **37.** Deinde paulatim decrescit et redit ad cottidianam mensuram. Et sic qui intraverat ascendit de aqua sanus factus a lepra vel a quacumque detinebatur infirmitate.

*Uninterpolated*

**38.** Iuxta desertum inter montes inhabitabiles sub terra fluit rivulus quidam, ad quem non patet aditus nisi ex fortuito casu. Aperitur enim aliquando terra et si quis inde transit tunc potest intrare et sub velocitate exire, ne forte terra claudatur. Et quicquit de harena rapit, lapides preciosi sunt et gemmae preciosae, quia harena et sabulum nichil sunt nisi lapides preciosi et gemmae preciosae. **39.** Et rivulus iste fluit in aliud flumen amplioris magnitudinis, in quod homines terrae nostrae intrant et maximam habundantiam preciosorum lapidum inde trahunt; nec audent illos vendere, nisi prius excellentiae nostrae ipsos demonstrent. Et si eos in thesauro nostro vel ad usum potentiae nostrae retinere volumus data medietate precii accipimus; sin autem, libere eos vendere possunt. **40.** Nutriuntur autem in terra illa pueri in aqua, ita ut propter inveniendos lapides aliquando tribus vel quatuor mensibus sub aqua tantum vivant.

**41.** Ultra fluvium vero lapidum sunt X tribus Iudaeorum, qui quamvis fingant sibi reges, servi tamen nostri sunt et tributarii excellentiae nostrae.

**42.** In alia quadam provincia iuxta torridam zonam sunt vermes, qui lingua nostra dicuntur salamandrae. Isti vermes non possunt vivere nisi in igne, et faciunt pelliculam quandam circa se, sicut alii vermes, qui faciunt sericum. **43.** Haec pellicula a dominabus palatii nostri studiose operatur, et inde habemus vestes et pannos ad omnem usum excellentiae nostrae. Isti panni non nisi in igne fortiter accenso lavantur.

**44.** In auro et argento et lapidibus preciosis, elephantibus,

dromedariis, camelis et canibus habundat serenitas nostra. **45.** Omnes extraneos hospites et peregrinos recipit mansuetudo nostra. Nullus pauper est inter nos. **46.** Fur nec praedo invenitur apud nos, nec adulator habet ibi locum neque avaricia. Nulla divisio est apud nos. Homines nostri habundant in omnibus diviciis. Equos paucos habemus et viles. Neminem nobis habere credimus parem in diviciis nec in numero gentium.

*Interpolation E*

**8.** Praeterea inter cetera mirabilia nostrae terrae, quae hominibus videntur nimis incredibilia, habemus V lapides incredibiliter virtuosos magnitudine avellanae. **9.** Primi quorum natura talis est, quod tam in yeme quam in aestate, si sub divo ponatur, undique circa se ad X miliaria tam magnum et ita asperrimum frigus facit, quod nullus siquidem hominum nullumque animalium per dimidiam dietam possit pati, quin statim constipetur et moriatur. **10.** Secundi lapidis natura est talis, quod similiter tam in ieme quam in aestate, si sub caelo ponitur, tam magnum et ita ferventissimum calorem faciat, quod nulla vivens creatura per dimidiam dietam posset pati, quin, velut stupa in camino ignis ardentis conburitur, penitus conburatur ac in cinere resolvatur. **11.** Tercius lapis est medius inter utrumque. Qui non est frigidus neque calidus sed est frigidus et calidus; in utroque ita est contemperatus, quod huius et huius intemperiem ita modificat, quod eorum asperitas in nullo quidquam potest nocere. **12.** Quartus lapis talis est, quod, si in media nocte in magnis tenebris sub caelo ponitur, circa se ad decem miliaria tam magnum lumen et splendorum facit, quod nihil tam subtile tam exiguum potest cogitari, quin quisque tamquam in media die, sole lucidissime lucente, clarissime posset intueri. **13.** Quintus vero talis est, quod si in media die, fervescente sole, ponitur sub caelo, undique circa se similiter ad X miliaria talem facit cum tenebris obscuritatem, quod nullus siquidem mortalium potest aliquid videre, nec etiam potest ubi sit scire vel cogitare. **14.** Isti namque lapides, ut dictum est, si sub caelo fuerint positi, praedictas habent virtutes, si vero fuerint absconsi, nec istas virtutes habent nec alias, immo ita deformes sunt, quod nichil penitus valere videntur.

**15.** Alios V lapides habemus, III quodum sunt consecrati et II inconsecrati. **16.** Primus istorum duorum naturaliter talis est virtutis, quod, si ponatur in vas plenum aqua, statim ex ipsa aqua fit lac albissimum, ad comedendum atque ad bibendum dulcissimum ac suavissimum, de nullo siquidem animali eo melius et suavius. Si vero ex ipsa aqua lapis iste astrahatur, remanet utrumque quod erat. **17.** Natura secundi lapidis talis est, quod similiter, si in vas plenum aqua

ponatur, illico ex ipsa aqua fit vinum meracissimum, multum redolens et ad bibendum certe valde gratissimum. De vite aut de arbore aliqua nusquam profecto reperitur eo melius et dulcius. Et si de ipsa aqua iste lapis eripitur, quod erat utrumque remanet, ut de alio lapide dictum est superius. **18.** Primus lapidum consecratorum ita est consecratus, quod, si mittitur in aqua, in qua pisces sunt, statim quum ponitur in ipsa, omnes pisces, ubicunque fuerint in aqua, citissime veniunt ad eum nec ab eo possunt separari, donec est in aqua. Tanta est virtus consecracionis ipsius lapidis. Et tunc quicunque vult pisces capere, sine rete et hamo et sine omni alio artificio de parvis et magnis piscibus secundum suam voluntatem quantoscunque vult et absque labore potest habere. Cum vero de aqua emittitur, recedunt pisces, quocumque volunt. **19.** Secundus lapis ita consecratus est, quod, si quilibet venator per silvam gradiens nervis draconum eundem lapidem ligatum post se trahat, omnes siquidem bestiae, tam maiores quam minores, tam ursi quam leones, tam cervi quam caprioli, tam lepores quam vulpes, tam lupi quam ceterae bestiae ibidem commorantes velocissimo cursu ipsum venatorem secuntur, quocumque ierit, nec queunt se ab ipso separare, quamdiu eas vult ducere. Tanta est virtus consecracionis ipsius lapidis. Et tunc ex illis bestiis, quantum quisque voluerit, absque impedimento valet capere. Nec est mirum, quia non possunt se defendere aut quoquam ire. Recepto vero lapide et a nervis draconum absoluto et in sinu absconso, recedunt bestiae quocunque volunt. **20.** Tercius lapis tali modo est consecratus, quod, si calido sanguine leonis fuerit aspersus, talis ignis ex eo exit, quod tam aquam quam lapides, tam terram quam cetera, quae ei opponuntur, velut stupam facillime penitus conburit, nec potest aliquo modo extingui, nisi lapis iste adspergatur calido sanguine draconis. Quando namque nostrae placet maiestati talem ignem facere, habemus leones et dracones paratos, quorum quidem sanguine ignis iste accenditur et extinguitur. Tali quippe igne consumimus inimicos nostros, si aliquando aliqui nobis apparent.

*Uninterpolated*

**47.** Quando procedimus ad bella contra inimicos nostros, XIII cruces magnas et praecelsas, factas ex auro et lapidibus pretiosis, in singulis plaustris loco vexillorum ante faciem nostram portari facimus, et unamquamque ipsarum secuntur X milia militum et C milia peditum armatorum, exceptis aliis, qui sarcinis et curribus et inducendi victualibus exercitus deputati sunt. **48.** Cum vero simpliciter equitamus, ante maiestatem nostram praecedit lignea crux, nulla pictura neque auro aut gemmis ornata, ut semper simus memores passionis domini nostri Iesu Christi, et vas unum aureum,

plenum terra, ut cognoscamus, quia caro nostra in propriam redigetur originem i. terram. **49.** Et aliut vas argenteum, plenum auro, portatur ante nos, ut omnes intelligant nos dominum esse dominantium. **50.** Omnibus diviciis, quae sunt in mundo, superhabundat et praecellit magnificentia nostra.

**51.** Inter nos nullus mentitur, nec aliquis potest mentiri. Et si quis ibi mentiri coeperit, statim moritur i. quasi mortuus inter nos reputatur, nec eius mentio fit apud nos i. nec honorem ulterius apud nos consequitur. **52.** Omnes sequimur veritatem et diligimus nos invicem. Adulter non est inter nos. Nullum vicium apud nos regnat.

**53.** Singulis annis visitamus corpus sancti Danielis prophetae cum exercitu magno in Babilone deserta, et omnes armati sunt propter tyros et alios serpentes, qui vocantur terrentes. **54.** Apud nos capiuntur pisces, quorum sanguine tinguitur purpura. **55.** Municiones habemus multas, gentes fortissimas et diversiformes. Dominamur Amazonibus et etiam Pragmanis.

*Interpolation D*

**k.** Amazones sunt mulieres, quae habent reginam per se, habitacio quarum est una insula, quae extenditur in omni parte usque ad mille milliaria, et circumcingitur undique quodam flumine, quod non habet principium neque finem, sicut anulus sine gemma. Latitudo huius fluminis est M quingentorum LXV stadiorum. **l.** In isto namque flumine sunt pisces dulcissimi ad comedendum et aptissimi ad capiendum. Sunt et alii pisces ibidem, formati ut magni dextrarii, habetes quatuor pedes optime dispositos, collum longum decenter, caput breve, aures acutas et caudas iacentes maxime convenienter. **m.** Isti siquidem naturaliter sunt ita humani, velud ab hominibus essent nutriti, et in cursu ita veloces, sicuti venti marini, qui ultro se ad capiendum in littore offerunt, bini et bini i. masculus et femella. Quos quando volunt Amazones equitant tota die, et in nocte sinunt eos in aquam redire. **n.** Non enim pisces sine aqua possunt vivere ultra diem. Sunt et alii formati ut pulcherrimi pallafredi vel muli et pingues ut rombi, quos per totam diem similiter equitant, in sero dimittunt eos in aquam ire. Alii sunt ut boves et asini formati, quibus arant, seminant, ligna lapides et quaecunque volunt trahunt tota die, et in nocte sunt in aqua usque ad alium diem. **o.** Sunt et alii formati ut parvi et magni canes, et ita veloces sunt in cursu et in venacione docti, quod nulla bestia potest ante eos fugere vel latere, quin statim capiatur. Alii sunt ut pulcherrimi accipitres vel austures, falcones hrodiones[9] formati, et sunt ita pulcherrimi, ac si decies vel vicies essent mutati, ac ita sunt fortes et veloces in volatu, quod nulla siquidem avis potest fugere ab eis, ut non statim capiatur. **p.** Mariti praedictarum mulierum non

morantur cum eis nec audent ad eas venire nisi statim vellent mori, sed habitant in ripa praedicti fluminis ultra. Statutum est enim, quod quicunque vir intraverit praedictam insulam, ipso die morietur. Istae namque vadunt ad eos et stant cum eis per septimanam vel per XV dies vel plures et postea dimittunt eas ad alias redire. **q.** Quando nascuntur pueri, nutriunt eos usque ad VII annos et postea reddunt eos patribus. Quando vero nascuntur puellae, retinent eas secum. Istae Amazones sunt doctissimae in bello et maxime in arcu, contis et venabulis. **r.** Habent arma argentea, quia non habent aliud aes sive metallum nisi argentum, unde faciunt vomeres, ligones, securim et alia instrumenta. Habent etiam terrenos equos fortissimos et velocissimos, super quos pugnant, et cum pugnant in ipsa pugna… ,[10] ut ante et retro et ex omni parte vulnerent et perimant inimicos. Velocius siquidem se volvunt super equos quam volvatur ipsa rota figuli, quum est in maximo motu rotandi. Currunt nempe propriis pedibus ita ut, si simul cum sagitta emissa fuerit de arcu incipiunt ire, antequam cadat in terram, velocissimo cursu eam manu recipiant. **s.** Quando altitudini nostrae placet ex hiis exercitum colligere, super inimicos nostros ducimus decies centena milia vel plures, si volumus. Mariti vero earum secuntur eas, non ut pugnent sed ut adorent eas, cum redeunt de pugna cum victoria.

**t.** Bragmani infiniti sunt et simplices homines, puram vitam ducentes. Nolunt plus habere quam racio naturae exigit. Omnia compaciuntur et sustinent. Illud dicunt esse superfluum quod non est necessarium. Sancti sunt in carne viventes. **u.** Quorum sanctitate et iusticia universa fere christianitas ubique sustentatur, ut credimus, et ne a dyabolo superetur, oracionibus eorum defenditur. Isti serviunt maiestati nostrae solummodo oracionibus suis nec nos aliud ab eis habere volumus.

*Uninterpolated*

**56.** Palatium vero, quod inhabitat sublimitas nostra, ad instar et similitudinem palacii, quod apostolus Thomas ordinavit Gundoforo, regi Indorum, in officinis et relique structura per omnia simile est illi. **57.** Laquearia, tigna quoque et epistilia sunt de lignis cethim. Coopertura eiusdem palacii est de ebeno, ne aliquo casu possit comburi. In extremitatibus vero super culmen palacii sunt duo poma aurea, et in unoquoque sunt duo carbunculi, ut aurum splendeat in die et carbunculi luceant in nocte. **58.** Maiores palacii portae sunt de sardonico inmixto cornu cerastis, ne aliquis latenter possit intrare cum veneno, ceterae ex ebeno, fenestrae de cristallo. **59.** Mensae, ubi curia nostra comedit, aliae ex auro aliae ex ametisto, columpnae, quae sustinent mensas, ex ebore. **60.** Ante palacium nostrum est platea

quaedam, in qua solet iusticia nostra spectare triumphos in duello. Pavimentum est de onichino et parietes intexti onichino, ut ex virtute lapidis animus crescat pugnantibus.

**61.** In praedicto palacio nostro non accenditur lumen in nocte nisi quod nutritur balsamo. **62.** Camera, in qua requiescit sublimitas nostra, mirabili opere auro et omni genere lapidum est ornata. Si vero alicubi propter ornatum sit onichimus [i.e. onichinus], circa ipsum eiusdem quantitatis quatuor sunt corneolae, ut ex virtute earum iniquitas onichini temperetur. **63.** Balsamum semper in eadem camera ardet. Lectus noster est de saphiro propter virtutem castitatis. **64.** Mulieres speciosissimas habemus, sed non accedunt ad nos nisi causa procreandorum filiorum quater in anno, et sic a nobis sanctificatae, ut Bersabee a David, redit unaquaque ad locum suum.

**65.** Semel in die comedit curia nostra. In mensa nostra comedunt omni die XXX milia hominum praeter ingredientes et exeuntes. Et hi omnes accipiunt expensas singulis diebus de camera nostra tam in equis quam in aliis expensis. **66.** Haec mensa est de pretioso smaragdo, quam sustinent duae columpnae de ametisto. Huius lapidis virtus neminem sedentem ad mensam permittit inebriari.

*Interpolation D*

**v.** Et quia molendina nostra inundacione aquarum saepe submergebantur, ne curiae nostrae propter infinitam multitudinem adveniencium et nobiscum commorancium panis aliquando fieret defectus, non longe a civitate nostra Bibric fecimus fieri molendinum sine aqua cum furno, conveniens nostrae maiestati. Hoc modo. Quatuor nempe columpnas magnas et praecelsas de auro purissimo fieri fecimus, quae in quadam planicie in quadrum sunt dispositae, distantes inter se plus quam XX pedes. Quarum longitudo est XL cubitorum, grossitudo X. **w.** Inter qua quidem columpnas superius fieri fecimus domum ceu globum rotundam, quae ita capitibus columpnarum est aequalis et iuncta, quod nichil praecellit columpnas nec columpnae supereminent. In qua domo non est aliqua fenestra nec hostium. Infra domum sunt duae magnae molae, optime ad molendum dispositae, factae de adamante lapide, quem namque lapidem neque lapis neque ignis neque ferrum potest confringere. **x.** Subtus vero domum infra columpnas est magna rota cum forti fuso de auro fulvissimo formata et disposita, velud est in aliis molendinis.

*Interpolation D*

Quae rota ita fortiter currit virtute lapidis qui est in pavimento, quod si quis eam firmis oculis vellet intueri, statim amitteret visum. **y.** Similiter granum virtute lapidum per quandam columpnam ascendit in molendinum et per quandam descendit farina in circulum, ubi a pistoribus panis efficitur et in clibano facto ex

asbesto ponitur et coquitur. Pavimentum clibani est de topazio viridi, qui naturaliter est frigidus, ut caliditas asbesti temperetur. Alioquin panis non coqueretur sed conbureretur. Tantus est calor asbesti. **z.** Longitudo huius furni est XL cubitorum, latitudo XV. Hostia sunt hinc et inde X, et pro unoquoque hostio sunt X pistores, et unusquisque pistorum habet de beneficio furni possessiones quingentorum militum et alias divicias multas. Magister vero pistorum habet tantum quantum omnes pistores et pro honore principatus habet tantumdem plus omnibus. Totidem sunt molendinarii et omnes sunt in beneficio aequales cum pistoribus nostris, quod si pistores pauciores essent molendinariis aut molendinarii pauciores pistoribus, aliquando invidia et contencio posset inter eos oriri. Ideoque placuit maiestate nostrae eos tam in numero quam in beneficio coaequare.

*Interpolation E*

**21.** Quae quando volvitur, mola superior velocius, quam credi vel cogitari possit, invisibiliter volvitur. Qualiter autem rota volvatur, audi. Longe enim ab isto molendino fere per XX miliaria versus orientem super altissimos montes, in quibus est ventus semper vehementissimus, fecimus sub terra magnam et introitu largissimam viam fieri. **22.** Fecimus et alias minores vias duo milia, quae omnes sub terra respondent huic viae maiori, quae via maior sub terra ducitur usque ad molendinum. Per quas vias ventus intrat et per auream columpnam exit, quae est versus rotam inclinata et usque ad eandem rotam extenditur, et inferius est larga et stricta superius, ut ventus fortius et durius et maiori impetu rotam reverberet et eam volvere faciat velocius.

**23.** Similiter fecimus fieri ab occidente, meridie et septentrione, ut, undecunque ventus veniat, faciat molendinum indesinenter et continue volutare super domum rotundam seu globeam, quae non est largior quam ipsae molae sunt latae, quae sunt interius. **24.** Et non est ibi hostium neque fenestra, ne ventus aliquando posset ventilare farinam et spergere. **25.** Praecepimus alteram domum fieri largam et altam, ad quam ascenditur per centum XL gradus, et per totidem ex alia parte descenditur, quorum alii sunt de auro, alii de argento, alii de preciosis lapidibus mixtim inter se dispositis. **26.** Huius scalae latitudo est X ulnarum, et est ita ampla, quod portat magis quam plaustrum oneratum frumento. Galli, qui nascuntur in quadam insula nostra, qui sunt maiores strucionibus, et etiam ipsi struciones per ipsam scalam facillime superius ad molendinum trahunt. **27.** In pavimento est quoddam foramen magnum, per quod frumentum in molendinum mittitur, ad quod officium deputati sunt omni die CC homines, nec possunt tantum nutrire, quod molendinum sacietur.

huius domus, quod est tectum molendini, **28.** Est etiam in isto molendino inferius infra columpnas aliud foramen in ea parte, unde molendinum expuit farinam, quae descendit in pistrinum per columpnam fusilem magnam et auream, quae columpna est ita coniuncta foramini, quod nullus umquam posset aliquo modo percipere. **29.** In quo pistrino noster furnus est factus mirabiliter. Est enim furnus factus exterius de lapidibus preciosis et auro, interius caelum et parietes sunt de albesto lapide, cuius natura talis est, quod semel calefactus sit, deinde inremissibiliter sine igne semper erit calidus. Pavimentum vero est de auro adamantino, fortitudo cuius neque ferro neque igne neque alio medicamine potest confringi sine yrcino sanguine. Sub isto itaque pavimento fecimus aliud pavimentum fieri.

## *Uninterpolated*

**67.** Ante fores palatii nostri iuxta locum, ubi pugnantes in duello agonizant, est speculum praecelsae magnitudinis, ad quod per CXXV

gradus ascenditur. **68.** Gradus vero sunt de porfiritico, partim de serpentino et alabastro a tercia parte inferius. Hinc usque ad terciam partem superius sunt de cristallo lapide et sardonico. Superior vero tercia pars de ametisto, ambra, iaspide et panthera. **69.** Speculum vero una sola columpna innititur. Super ipsam vero basis iacens, super basim columpnae duae, super quas item alia basis et super ipsam quatuor columpnae, super quas item alia basis et super ipsam VIII columpnae, super quas item alia basis et super ipsam columpnae XVI, super quas item alia basis, super quam columpnae XXXII, super quas item alia basis et super ipsam columpnae LXIIII, super quas item alia basis, super quam item columpnae LXIIII, super quas item alia basis et super ipsam columpnae XXXII. Et sic descendendo diminuuntur columpnae, sicut ascendo creverunt, usque ad unam. **70.** Columpnae autem et bases eiusdem generis lapidum sunt, cuius et gradus, per quos ascenditur ad eas. **71.** In summitate vero supremae columpnae est speculum, tali arte consecratum, quod omnes machinationes et omnia, quae pro nobis et contra nos in adiacentibus et subiectis nobis provinciis fiunt, a contuentibus liquidissime videri possunt et cognosci. **72.** Custoditur autem a XII milibus armatorum tam in die quam in nocte, ne forte aliquo casu frangi possit aut deici.

**73.** Singulis mensibus serviunt nobis reges VII, unusquisque illorum in ordine suo, duces LXII, comites CCCLXV in mensa nostra, exceptis illis, qui diversis officiis deputati sunt in curia nostra. **74.** In mensa nostra comedunt omni die iuxta latus nostrum in dextra parte archiepiscopi XII, in sinistra parte episcopi XX, praeter patriarcham sancti Thomae et protopapaten Sarmagantinum et archiprotopapaten de Susis, ubi thronus et solium gloriae nostrae residet et palacium imperiale. Quorum unusquisque singulis mensibus redeunt ad domum propriam per vices suas. Ceteri a latere nostro nunquam discedunt. **75.** Abbates vero secundum numerum dierum anni serviunt nobis in capella nostra et singulis mensibus redeunt ad propria, et alii totidem singulis kalendis ad idem officium capellae revertuntur.

*Interpolation B*

**76.** Habemus aliud palatium non maioris longitudinis sed maioris altitudinis et pulcritudinis, quod factum est per revelationem, quae antequam nasceremur, apparuit patri nostro, qui ob sanctitatem et iusticiam, quae mirabiliter vigebant in eo, vocabatur Quasideus. **77.** Dictum namque est ei in somnis: ‘Fac palatium filio tuo, qui nasciturus est tibi, qui erit rex regum terrenorum et dominus dominantium universae terrae. **78.** Et habebit illud palatium a Deo sibi talem gratiam collatam:

*Interpolation B*

quod ibi nullus unquam esuriet, nullus infirmabitur, nullus etiam intus existens poterit mori in illa die, qua intraverit. Et si validissimam famem quis habuerit et infirmetur ad mortem, si intraverit palatium et steterit ibi per aliquam moram, ita exiet satur, ac si de centum ferculis comedisset, et ita sanus, quasi nullam infirmitatem in vita sua passus fuisset'.

*Interpolation C*

nullus ea die, qua intraverit, infirmabitur, nullus esuriet, nec ibi quis stans morietur.

*Interpolation C*

**79.** Nascetur etiam in eo fons quidam super omnia sapidissimus et odoriferus, qui nunquam exibit de palacio, sed de uno angulo, quo nascetur, fluet per palacium ad alium angulum ex adverso, et ibi recipiet eum terra, et sub terra revertetur ad ortum suum, quemadmodum sol de occidente revertitur sub terra ad orientem. **80.** Sapiet enim in ore cuiusque gustantis quicquid optabit comedere et bibere. Tanto siquidem odore replebit palacium, ac si omnia genera pigmentorum, aromatum et unguentorum ibi pilarentur et commoverentur et multo his plus omnibus. **81.** De quo quidem fonte si quis per triennium et trimensium et tres septimanas et per tres dies et per tres horas omni die ter ieiunus gustaverit et in tribus horis ita gustaverit, quod nec ante ipsam horam et post horam, sed in spacio, quod est infra principium et finem uniuscuiusque istarum trium horarum, ter ieiunus gustaverit, ante siquidem trecentos annos et tres menses et tres septimanas et tres dies et tres horas non morietur, et erit semper in aetate extremae iuventutis. **82.** Porro quicumque tamdiu vixerit, in ultima die praedictorum temporum convocabit parentes et amicos suos et dicet eis: 'Amici mei et proximi mei, ecce iam cito moriar. Rogo vos, ut claudatis super me sepulchrum, et orate pro me'. **83.** Hoc nempe dicto ilico intrabit sepulchrum et, valedicens eis, deponet se, quasi velit dormire et ut impleatur prophetia 'finita iam hora reddet animam creatori suo'. **84.** Videntes autem hoc omnes more solito plangent super corpus dilecti et clauso sepulchro commendant eum domino et recedunt.

*Interpolation E*

**30.** Et quod tibi hoc eveniat, hoc tibi sit signum:

**31.** In planicie, quae dicitur Rimoc, est quidam lapis magnus et excelsus, quem Porus, rex Indorum, mirabiliter fecit complanari et quadrari. Altitudo cuius est C passuum et latitudo L, et undique ab hoc lapide extenditur haec planicies fere per XX miliaria. **32.** In qua quidem non est arbor neque lapis, non est collis neque vallis, sed sunt

ibi multi fontes et rivuli dulcissimi, passim per planiciem manantes; et omnia genera herbarum odoriferarum ibi repperiuntur. **33.** Super quem lapidem hac nocte nascetur tanta et talis arbor, quanta et qualis numquam fuit visa a principio mundi, nec erit usque ad finem. Ad quam nulla avis accedet, ne aliquo modo possit deturpari. Nullum eciam foliorum eius, quae sunt densissima et velud aurum lucidissima, aliquo tempore cadet. **34.** In summitate vero huius arboris nascetur quaedam virga directissima sine ramis, sine foliis, alta C pedibus et grossa quantum duo homines possunt anplexari. In cuius capite nascetur quoddam pomum incredibiliter magnum et lucidissimum, splendorem cuius nemo oculis poterit pati, nisi manum in fronte posuerit, velud solem vellet respicere. **35.** Et ubicunque fuerint vel steterint hoc pomum intuentes, si fuerint infirmi, suavitate odoris eius illico optime sanabuntur, vel, si fuerint lassi, statim forciores fient quam prius fuerint. Si fuerint famelici vel sitibundi, in continenti ita saturabuntur, quod ad minus per X et VIII dies non esurient neque sicient amplius'.

*Interpolation B*

**85.** Mane facto Quasideus, pater meus, perterritus de tanta visione surrexit et…

*Interpolation C*

cum cogitaret et multum esset sollicitus, audivit altisonam vocem, quam et omnes, qui secum aderant, audierunt dicentem: **86.** 'O Quasideus, fac quod praeceptum est tibi, noli aliquo modo hesitare, quia omnia erunt, sicut tibi praedicta sunt'. **87.** Ad istam nempe vocem admotum confortatus est pater meus et statim…

*Interpolation B*

praecepit palatium fieri, in cuius compositione non sunt nisi lapides preciosi et aurum optimum liquatum pro cemento. **88.** Caelum eiusdem, i. tectum, est de lucidissimis saphiris, et clarissimi topazii passim sunt interpositi, ut saphiri ad similitudinem purissimi caeli et topacii in modum stellarum palatium illuminent. **89.** Pavimentum vero est de magnis tabulis cristallinis. Camera nec alia divisio est infra palatium. Quinquaginta columnae de auro purissimo ad modum acus formatae intra palatium iuxta parietes sunt dispositae. **90.** In unoquoque angulo est una, reliquae infra ipsas locatae sunt. Longitudo unius cuiusque columpnae est LX cubitorum, grossitudo est, quantum duo homines suis ulnis circumcingere possunt, et unaquaeque in suo

cacumine habet unum carbunculum adeo magnum, ut est magna amphora, quibus illuminatur palatium ut mundus illuminatur a sole. **91.** Quare columpnae sint ut acus acutae? Hac videlicet de causa, quia, si ita essent grossae superius ut inferius, pavimentum et totum palatium non ita illuminaretur splendore carbunculorum. **92.** Tanta est namque claritas ibi, ut nichil tam exiguum, tam subtile possit excogitari, si in pavimento esset, quin posset ab aliquo intueri. **93.** Nulla fenestra nec aliquod foramen est ibi, ne claritas carbunculorum et aliorum lapidum claritate serenissimi caeli et solis aliquo modo possit obnubilari.

*Interpolation C*

**94.** Porta est una in eo de purissimo et lucidissimo cristallo, circumcincta de auro fulvissimo, posita ad orientem, altitudo cuius est centum XXX cubitorum, quae quando sublimitas nostra venit ad palatium, per se aperitur et clauditur, nullo eam tangente. Sed quando alii intrant, ostiarii eam claudunt et aperiunt. **95.** Omni siquidem die intramus palacium istud ad bibendum de fonte, quando sumus in civitate illa, in qua est palacium, quae dicitur Briebric. Quando vero equitamus, facimus de fonte illo, quocumque imus, nobiscum portari, et omni die ter ieiuni gustamus, sicut in paterna visione praeceptum est.

*Interpolation B*

**96.** In die nativitatis nostrae et cotiens coronamur, intramus palatium istud et tamdiu sumus intus, donec potuissemus ibi comedisse, et inde eximus saturi, ac si omni genere ciborum essemus repleti.

*Interpolation D*

**aa.** Iuxta hoc palacium habemus capellam vitream non manu factam, mirabiliorem omnibus mirabilibus, quae cum nichil ibi esset, in prima die nativitatis nostrae apparuit, ubi nunc est, ad gloriam et decorem nominis nostri. **bb.** Divina enim disposicione facta est adeo: si tres homines intrant, plena est; si X vel XX intrant, crescit et plena est; si centum vel mille, crescit et plena est et si X vel XX milia, vel C milia intrant, crescit et plena est. A tribus et supra usque ad infinitum semper crescit et plena est. Et sicut crescit in introitu hominum usque ad infinitum et semper est plena, ita decrescit usque ad tres et semper est plena. **cc.** A tribus vero et infra non crescit neque decrescit. Hoc autem habet significare sanctam et individuam trinitatem, quia, sicut capella a tribus infra non patitur augmentum neque detrimentum, ita

sancta trinitas non patitur augmentum neque detrimentum, i. non recipit plures personas vel pauciores quam tres. **dd.** Semper enim in tribus personis consistit, scilicet in patre et filio et spiritu sancto, quae tres personae sunt unus verus Deus et una essentia divina.

**ee.** Capellani huius capellae omnes dementulati sunt, et omnes, qui debent esse capellani in eadem capella, ab uberibus matris dementulantur. Virgines enim et mundi ab omni labe debent esse, qui in tam sacro et sanctissimo loco Deo nostro exhibent officia divina. **ff.** Cum vero statutis horis debent hanc intrare capellam ad celebranda divina officia, prius ex toto se denudant in quadam camera, quae est iuxta capellam, quam ad hoc fecimus fieri. Et ita denudati stant in limine capellae, in quo quidem loco vestes mirabiles suscipiunt et inenarrabiles, quibus induti sollempniter et devote divina officia celebrant. **gg.** Si quaeratur, unde sint vestes et quomodo factae, et a quo vel a quibus dentur, nec ipsi, qui eas recipiunt, nec alius mortalis posset hoc dicere vel etiam aliquo modo excogitare. **hh.** Scimus hoc tantum, quod ita sunt lucidae et praeclarae, quod nemo sine caligine oculorum potest eas contemplari. Ecce divinis celebratis, ubi vestes assumpserunt, ibidem, nescientes qualiter aut quomodo, eas deponunt et, receptis propriis vestibus in praedicta camera, redeunt in claustrum, quod est ibi prope. **ii.** De diviciis et magnitudine huius claustri longum esset enarrare. Unum tantum sciri potest, quod nullum regnum in diviciis potest ei coaequari.

**kk.** Habemus siquidem arborem magnam, in summitate cuius est quaedam virga cum pomo superius. De praedicta vero arbore quaedam gumma lucidissima per unum solum foramen indesinenter egreditur, quae cum durescit, fit ex ea quidam lapis, qui dicitur stintochim. **ll.** Natura eius, velut aqua ignem extinguit et ut ignis candelam comburit, ita praedicta gumma ferrum consumit, et si per maria et alia flumina de littore ad litus navigio trahitur, ea certe ita dividit aquam, quod quilibet sicco pede potest hinc inde indubitanter transire. **mm.** Ex hac namque gumma, cum est tenera, vasa anulos et quaecunque volumus facimus fieri tamquam de mollissima cera. Porro pro fortitudine huius lapidis ex praedicta gumma nostra facimus arma fieri, scilicet clipeum, lanceam, gladium, galeam, loricam et ocreas, et etiam calcaria, quae namque tam in die quam in nocte resplendent, sicut duo luminaria caeli.

**nn.** Indorum quidam sapientes dicunt praedictam arborem nostram personam significare, quia, sicut illa arbor alias superat fructu et odore, ita nostra persona in hoc mundo non habet similem neque parem. Virgam, quae est in summitate huius arboris dicunt potenciam nostram significare, quia sicut illa alta est et fortissima, ita nostra potentia est alta, immo est altissima et ita fortis, quod a nemine aliquo modo potest superari. **oo.** Pomum vero, quod est in capite virgae,

similiter asserunt nostram iusticiam designare, quia, sicut suavitate eius odoris infirmi sanantur, lapsi recreantur, famelici et sitibundi saturantur, ita et iusticia nostra. Et, quod plus est, ea homines amplius et diutius vivunt. **pp.** Alii autem dicunt praedictam arborem mundum significare. Per virgam namque nostram assignant pariter personam, quia, sicut arbor virgae, ita universus orbis seu mundus nostrae subiacet personae. Pomum vero, ut dictum est, nostram iusticiam significat.

**qq.** Habemus aliud palacium, quod fuit Pori, regis Indorum, de stirpe cuius omnis terra nostra et progenies descendit. In quo quidem palacio multa sunt humanis mentibus penitus incredibilia. **rr.** Ibi namque sunt quingentae columpnae aureae cum capitellis aureis, et vites aureae dependent inter ipsas columpnas, habentes folia aurea et ramos, alios de cristallo, alios de saphiris, alios ex margaritis, alios ex smaragdis; et parietes eius sunt vestiti laminis aureis ligatis, quae sunt grossae ad modun humani digiti. Qui parietes eius sunt ornati ex margaritis carbunculis et omni lapide precioso. **ss.** Fores eiusdem palacii sunt eburneae et laminis aureis undique vestitae. Camerae sunt de lignis cethim et omni opere, quod umquam potest fieri de auro et argento et omni lapide precioso ornatae. **tt.** In aula huius palacii sunt XX magnae statuae aureae, et infra ipsas sunt totidem magnae arbores argenteae, velut lucernae lucidissime lucentes, in quibus resident omnia genera avium aurearum, et unaquaeque habet colorem secundum genus suum, et sunt ita per artem musicam dispositae, quod, quando Porus rex volebat, omnes simul cantabant secundum suam naturam aut unaquaeque per se singulariter. **uu.** Similiter praedictae statuae musicae ita sunt aptatae, quod ad voluntatem regis dulcius et suiavius, quam credi potest, cantabant. Et, quod mirabilius est omni mirabili, more histrionum videntur modis diversis iocari et hinc illinc torqueri. **vv.** Quas nempe statuas et aves tam in yeme quam in aestate, quando placet nostrae celsitudini, facimus cantare et iocari, dulcedo et suavitas cuius cantilenae talis et tanta est, quod auditores incontinenter obdormire facit et quodammodo extra mentes efficiuntur.

*Interpolation E*

**36.** Adhuc de cibo, quo nostra vescitur sublimitas, tuae dilectioni aliquid volumus significare. ‘Aliquid’ dicimus, quoniam, cum multifariam multisque modis ipse noster cibus conficiatur, longum quidem esset per singula enarrare. **37.** Hoc unum ad praesens scias, quod noster cibus ad ignem non coquitur, ne fumo aut caliginibus seu cineribus aut etiam carbonibus aliquo modo possit commaculari. **38.** Habemus namque quendam lapidem, qui dicitur zimur, qui inciditur

de quodam monte, qui vocatur eodem nomine zimurc, qui sua natura est ita calidissimus, quod certe nullus mortalium aliquomodo posset eum contingere, nisi suis manibus gestaret ferrea tenacula. De quo quidem lapide fiunt vasa intus deaurata, in quibus noster cibus sine igne coquitur. **39.** Habemus eciam quendam fontem, qui continue bullit et inremissibiliter et naturaliter ita semper est calidus, quod ad eius calorem non minus nec peius sed longe melius et purius quam ad ignem cibus percoquitur. Huius aquae nempe talis et tanta est virtus, quod, si de fonte levatur, semper bullit et semper fit calidior, et quanto longius portatur, semper bullit et sic semper de caliditate fit calidissima. **40.** De hac quippe aqua implentur magnae conchae aureae sive deaurata dolia, in quibus mittuntur magni tripodes aurei. Super quemlibet ponuntur praedicta vasa lapidea, in quibus noster cibus tam calore aquae quam vasorum sine igne, sine fumo delicate coquitur. **41.** Quando vero equitamus, de hac aqua cum hiis vasis nobiscum satis ferri facimus, ut, ubicunque simus, noster cibus sic paretur, ut dictum est superius.

*Interpolation C*

**97.** Si iterum quaeris, cum creator omnium fecerit nos praepotentissimum et gloriosissimum super omnes mortales…

*Uninterpolated*

Quare sublimitas nostra digniori quam presbiteratus nomine nuncupari se non permittat, non debet prudentia tua adminari. **98.** Plures enim in curia nostra ministeriales habemus, qui digniori nomine et officio, quantum ad ecclesiasticam dignitatem spectat, et etiam maiori quam nos in divinis officiis praediti sunt. Dapifer enim noster primas est et rex, pincerna noster archiepiscopus et rex, camerarius noster episcopus et rex, marescalcus noster rex et archimandrita, princeps cocorum rex et abbas. Et icirco altitudo nostra non est passa se nominari eisdem nominibus aut ipsis ordinibus insigniri, quibus curia nostra plena esse videtur, et ideo minori nomine et inferiori gradu propter humilitatem magis elegit nuncupari.

*Interpolation C*

**99.** De gloria et potentia nostra non possumus ad praesens satis tibi dicere. Sed cum veneris ad nos, dices, quia vere sumus dominus dominantium universae terrae. Hoc tantillum interim scias, quod…

*Uninterpolated*

Extenditur terra nostra in partem unam fere ad quatuor menses in amplitudine in altera vero parte nemo potest scire quantum protendatur dominium nostrum. **100.** Si potes dinumerare stellas caeli et harenam maris, dinumera et dominium nostrum et potestatem nostram.

*Interpolation D*

**xx.** Data in nostra civitate Bibric XV Kalendas Aprilis anno LI nativitatis nostrae. De confirmacione: omnia quae superius dicta sunt, quasi incredibilia, verissima esse, quidam cardinalis, Stephanus nomine, sub pollicitacione suae fidei dicebat et omnibus patenter pronunciabat.

*Interpolation E*

**42.** Explicit liber sive Istoria presbiteri Iohannis, quae translata fuit de Graeco in Latinum a Christiano Maguntino archiepiscopo. Iste Christianus superpositus fuit Chunrado archiepiscopo. Iste Manuel regnavit in Graecia ab anno domini 1144 usque ad annum domini 1180.

## The Prester John Letter

*Date:* c.1165–70 (for Uninterpolated Version)[11]

*[The* Prester John Letter *is without doubt one of the most creative and imaginative texts written in the Middle Ages. The bombastic personality of Prester John, from whose perspective it is written, makes the text humorous centuries later, but it is unclear whether medieval audiences saw it in this light.[12] It was penned by a European, probably a German national c.1165–70, and it quickly became one of the most widely circulated texts in Europe. The writer's motive is not entirely clear, though arguments have been made that the text forms part of the power struggle between Pope Alexander III and Holy Roman Emperor Frederick Barbarossa, which came to a head in the 1170s.[13] The various interpolations given below add detail and character to the text, and all date to the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The complex textual traditions are discussed below in Appendix 2.]*

*Uninterpolated*

Prester John, lord of lords, by the power and virtue of God and our

lord Jesus Christ, to Emanuel, Roman governor, let us rejoice in salvation and cross over to the end enriched by grace.[14]

It was announced to our majesty that you admire our excellence and that mention of our highness was made to you. But we have also learned through our delegate that you wished to send certain playful and delightful things to us, from which our justice might be amused. And indeed, since I am a man, as I certainly am, so we are sending some [information] about us across to you through our delegate, because we wish and desire to know if you hold the right faith like us, and if you believe in our lord Jesus Christ through all things. For although we know that you are a man, your little Greeks hold you to be a god, while we recognise that you are mortal and subject to human corruption. If you have need of any things for your pleasure from the customary abundance of our generosity, assure us through our delegate and through your proclamation of goodwill, and you will obtain them. Receive the bishop in our name and make use of him, because we gladly use your herald, so that we might thus strengthen and reinforce our virtue mutually. Likewise, respect, consider, and examine our man.[15] And if you wish to come to our domain, we will set you up as a great and worthy man of our house, and you will be able to enjoy our abundance, and if you wish to return, you will return enriched from these things, which abound in our lands. Remember your end and for eternity you will not sin.[16]

If you truly wish to know the magnitude and excellence of our highness, and in which lands our power dominates, understand and believe without doubt, that I, Prester John, am lord of lords and exceed all kings of the entire earth in virtue, power, and all the riches which are under heaven. Seventy-two kings are tributaries to us. I am a devoted Christian, and everywhere we protect the poor Christians that our clemency's authority rules over, and we sustain them with our alms. We have it on oath to visit the Lord's sepulchre with the greatest army, as is fitting, to humble the glory of our majesty, and to vanquish the enemies of the cross of Christ and exalt His blessed name.

Our magnificence dominates in the three Indias, and our land crosses from Farther India, in which rests the body of St Thomas the apostle, through the desert, and proceeds towards the sunrise, and returns down into the Babylonian desert, next to the tower of Babel. Seventy-two provinces serve us, of which few are made up of Christians, and each one of them has its own king, who are all tributaries to us. In our land are born and raised elephants, dromedaries, camels, hippopotami, crocodiles, *methagallinarii, cametheternis, thinsiretae*,[17] leopards, wild donkeys, white and red lions, white bears, white blackbirds, silent cicadas, griffins, tigers,

jackals, hyenas…

*Interpolation D*

… savage pigs as large as oxen with teeth one cubit long, great savage dogs the size of horses, whose ferocity exceeds that of every kind of wild animal, which our hunters steal while they are puppies in their mothers' laps, I know not whether by skill, by incantation or perhaps by trick, and carefully raise and tame. Truly, after this they become large and are thoroughly taught to hunt, then they are shown to our majesty, and we often have one thousand or more of them in our hunting party. There are also raised in our land savage horses, savage donkeys, little horned men, savage cows, savage men, one-eyed men, men with eyes in front and back, men without heads, with their mouth and eyes on their chest, whose length is 12 feet, their width six feet; in colour they are similar to purest gold; men with 12 feet, six arms, 12 hands, four heads, and on each one of them they have two mouths and three eyes. There are also born in our land women with great bodies, beards down to their breasts, flat heads, clothed in skins; these most excellent huntresses raise beasts to hunt instead of dogs, lion against lion, bear against bear, stag against stag, and so on.

*Uninterpolated*

… savage cows, archers [i.e. centaurs], savage men, horned men, fauns, satyrs and women of the same race, pygmies, dog-headed men, giants whose height is 40 cubits, one-eyed men, cyclopses and a bird which is called 'phoenix', and almost every kind of animal which is under heaven.

*Interpolation D*

In certain other provinces of ours are raised ants the size of puppies, with six feet and claws like lobsters, and they have teeth below the mouth, larger than those of dogs, with which they eat, and teeth outside the mouth larger than those of forest boars, with which they kill both men and other animals. And after killing them, they immediately devour them. In fact, this is not a strange thing; indeed, they are so fast in speed that you would think without doubt that they fly, and for that reason no men live in those provinces unless in safe and most fortified places. In fact, these ants are under the ground from sunset to the third hour of the day [9 a.m.] and all night they dig up the purest gold and bring it to the light. Truly, they are above ground from the third hour of the day until sunset, and this is when they eat.

Then they go underground to dig up gold. And they do this every day. In fact, by night the men descend from their fortifications and collect the gold, which they place on elephants, hippopotami, camels, *camethurni,* and other beasts great in body and powerful in strength, and they carry it to our treasuries every day. By night they work, plough, sow, reap, come and go, and they do whatever they want, but by day no one dares to show up while the ants are above ground, such is the strength and ferocity of those ants.[18]

*Interpolation C*

We have other peoples who feed only on meat, as much of men as of brute beasts and of foetuses; they are never afraid to die. And when one of them dies, both his parents and strangers eagerly eat him, saying: 'It is most sacred to chew human flesh'. The names of these peoples are these: Gog and Magog, Amic, Agic, Arenar, Defar, Fontineperi, Conei, Samantae, Agrimandi, Salterei, Armei, Anofragei, Annicefelei, Tasbei, and Alanei. Certainly, the boy Alexander the Great, King of the Macedonians, confined these and many other races between the highest mountains in the northern parts. When we wish, we lead them against our enemies, and, once our majesty has given them license to devour them, at once no man nor animal remains without being immediately devoured. In fact, when the enemies have been devoured, we lead them [Gog and Magog, etc.] back to their own places. And we lead them back for this reason: because if they were to return without us, they would completely devour all men and every animal that they may find. Indeed, at the time of the Antichrist, before the end of the age, these most wicked races will come forth from the four parts of the earth and will encircle all the villages of the saints and the great city of Rome, which we proposed to give to our son, who will be first born to us, with all of Italy and the whole of Germany and both of the two Frances, along with England, Britain and Scotland; we will give him Spain and all the land up to the congealed sea.[19] Nor is it a strange thing, because their number is as the sand on the sea shore; certainly no people, no kingdom, can resist them. Truly, on account of their abominations, these races will not be on trial [on Judgment Day], as indeed the prophet prophesied, but God will send fire upon them from heaven, and He will so consume them that not even their ashes will remain.[20]

*Uninterpolated*

Our land flows with honey, abounds in milk. In a certain land of ours

no poisons harm, nor does the chattering frog croak,
no scorpion is there, nor any serpent snaking in the grass.[21]

Poisonous animals cannot live in that place nor hurt anyone. Amongst the pagans, through a certain province of ours flows a river called the Ydonus [i.e. the Indus?]. This river, proceeding from paradise, extends its windings through that entire province by various paths, and in that place are found common stones, emeralds, sapphires, carbuncles, topazes, chrysolites, onyxes, beryls, amethysts, sardians, and many other precious stones. In that place grows a herb which is called 'assidios', whose root, if one carries it upon themselves, drives off [any] unclean spirit and forces him to say who he is, where he is from, and his name. For this reason, unclean spirits do not dare to attack anybody in that land.[22] In another certain province of ours, every pepper grows and is collected, which is made into grain, food, leather, and clothes. That land is also well-wooded like a willow grove and full throughout with serpents. [*Interpolation D*: These serpents are large and have two heads and horns like rams and eyes that shine like lamps]. But when the pepper ripens,

*Uninterpolated*
the woods are set alight and the fleeing serpents go into their caverns, and then the pepper is shaken off the saplings, dried and cooked, but no stranger is permitted to know how it is cooked.

*Interpolation A*
all the people come from nearby regions carrying with them husks, stalks and the driest woods, with which they surround the whole forest on all sides, and when the wind blows strongly, they place fire underneath the forest and outside it, so that no serpent may be able to depart from the forest, and in this way all the serpents die in the strongly blazing fire, except for those who go into their caverns. Mark this! When the fire is consumed, the men and women, small and large, carrying forks in their hands, go into the forest and throw all the roasted serpents out of the forest with their forks, and from these they make the most thickly packed heaps, as is done on a threshing floor after the grain husks have been shaken off.

*Interpolation D*
Indeed, the Indian wise-men delicately make these [roasted snakes] into flour in the mill-house, with certain well-dried healing herbs. Accordingly, this flour prevails over all medicines, [to help] unhealthy men to procreate, and also [to help] unhealthy women to conceive, and, as I will mention generally and briefly, it prevails against all illnesses if it is applied or taken according to the manner of each illness.

*Uninterpolated*

This forest is situated at the foot of Mount Olympus, whence a clear spring emerges, which preserves flavours of all types within it. The flavour changes every hour of the day and night, and it proceeds by a

journey of three days not far from paradise, from which Adam was expelled. If any thirsty person drinks from this fountain three times, he will suffer no illness from that day forth, and he will always be as though he is 32 years of age, however long he may live. There are little stones there, which are called 'midriosi',[23] which eagles are often accustomed to carry to our parts, through which they regain their youth and restore sight. If anyone wears one on his finger, sight does not fail him, and if it is [already] impaired, it is restored, and the more he sees, the more his sight is sharpened. Blessed by the proper charm, it renders a man invisible, dispels hatred, creates harmony, and drives out envy.

*Interpolation E*

In the farthest parts of the world, towards the south, we have a certain great and uninhabitable island, on which all the time the Lord rains manna most abundantly twice a week, which is collected and eaten by the people who live nearby, and they do not feed on any other food. Indeed, they do not plough, sow, or reap, nor do they disturb the land in any way to gain the most fertile fruit from it. In fact, this manna tastes in their mouths the same as it tasted in the mouths of the sons of Israel on their departure from Egypt.[24] In fact, these men know no women except their wives. They do not have envy or hatred; they live peacefully; they do not quarrel amongst themselves for their own sake; and they do not have a mayor above them except the one that we send to receive our tribute. In fact, for tribute they pay every year to our majesty 50 elephants and as many hippopotami, and these are loaded with purest balsam, and as many are loaded with precious stones and fine gold. Certainly, the men of that land abound in precious stones and the yellowest gold. These men, who live thus in heavenly nourishment, each live for 500 years. But even so, they regain 100 years of life and they are all renewed by drinking three times from the certain fountain, which flows out towards the base of a certain tree standing there, namely on the aforesaid island. And when that water has been taken or drunk three times, so I declare, they cast away 100 years of age in this way, and they are so stripped [of the years] that they seem without hesitation to be thirty or forty years of age and no more. And in this way they always regain 100 years and they are altogether changed. Later, after 500 years, they die and, as is the custom of that people, they are not buried but are carried away to the aforenamed island and they are erected standing next to those trees, the leaves of which fall at no time and are very thick. The shade of these leaves is most pleasing and the fruit of these trees has a most pleasant smell. The flesh of those dead people does not grow pale, nor

does it rot or become moist or turn to ashes or decay, but it remains fresh and coloured as though alive, and it will remain so, unharmed until the time of the Antichrist, just as a certain prophet foretold. Truly, at the time of the Antichrist, as the divine word is fulfilled, this was said to Adam: 'you are earth and you will return to the earth',[25] then indeed will be revealed through him the most boundless earth, with no one digging it out, and thus the earth will devour them. And when they have been devoured, the land will be closed as it was before, and thus their flesh will be earth below the earth, and from there they will rise up again and come to judgement, either judging or being judged.

Also, there is towards the south in that region a certain place of ours at which the world ends, which is called the Cavern of Dragons. It is long and wide, excessively difficult and most severe in severity and difficult, with a deepness in depth that is most deep, and most cavernly and full of secret places. Indeed, in this place, there are infinite thousands of terrible dragons, which the residents of those surrounding provinces guard with the greatest diligence, lest any wizards from India or elsewhere are able to steal one of those dragons. For in fact, the princes of the Indians are accustomed to have dragons at weddings and at other banquets of theirs, and without dragons they do not consider the banquet to be complete. And just as cattle and mule herders are accustomed to humble and humanise the horses' young, to teach them and tame them, and to call them by their own names, to place bridle and saddle on them, and to ride them anywhere they wish, so too these men who have custody and command of the dragons, the dragon commanders, humble the same dragons by their incantations and magic, humanise them, teach them, subdue them, and call them by their own names, place bridle and saddle on them, and ride them whenever and wherever they wish. Every year, these dragon peoples release to our magnificence for tribute 100 men, dragon masters, and 100 dragons humanised in this way, which are like cows amongst these men, and when the men play with them admirably by leading them here and there by the head and tail, [the dragons are] like dogs. Truly, these men with their dragons are our couriers; when it pleases our clemency, desiring to know all the news from every part, we send them with those dragons flying through the air through every climate of the world.

*Uninterpolated*

Amongst the other things that occur miraculously in our land is a sandy sea without water.[26] Indeed, the sand is moved and swells into waves in imitation of every sea, and is never calm. This sea cannot be

crossed by any means, and therefore it is impossible to know the nature of the land beyond it. And although it may be entirely devoid of water, nevertheless there are found by the bank on our side diverse species of fish, most pleasing and tasty to eat, which are seen nowhere else. Three days distant from this sea are certain mountains from which a river of stones descends, similarly without water, and it flows through our land to the sandy sea. It flows for three days out of seven, and small and large rocks slide down, and they drag wood with them to the sandy sea, and after the river enters the sea, the stones and wood vanish and do not reappear on the other side. Nor can anyone cross it while it is flowing. A crossing lies open for four days only.

*Interpolation C*

Also, there is in the plain between the sandy sea and the aforesaid mountains a stone of extraordinary power, having the strength in it, you may say, of incredible medicine. Indeed, it heals only Christians or those who desire to become such, who are being held back by some kind of illness, in the following way. There is a certain stone that is concave like a copper shell, in which there is always water at a depth of four fingers, and it is always guarded by two old men of respected sanctity. These men first question those who are coming if they are or wish to become Christians, then if they desire health in their entire soul. When they have professed this, after taking off their clothes, they enter the shell. And if they have professed truly, the water begins to rise and swell to such a point that it covers them completely, so that it rises above their heads. And this happens three times. Then it gradually decreases and returns to its usual measure. And in this way whoever had entered rises up out of the water healthy, freed from leprosy or from whatever illness was afflicting them.

*Uninterpolated*

Next to the desert between uninhabitable mountains, a certain stream flows beneath the earth, to which no entrance can be made unless by an accidental fall. Indeed, sometimes the land is opened up, and if anyone crosses that place at that moment, he can enter and exit with great speed lest the land may perhaps be closed up. And whatever grains of sand he grabs are precious stones and precious gems, because the sand and gravel are nothing but precious stones and precious gems. And this stream flows into another river of greater size, into which the men of our land enter and from which they carry out the greatest abundance of precious stones; and they do not dare to sell them unless they have shown them to our excellency first. And if we

wish to keep them in our treasure chamber or for the sake of our own power, after paying a fair price, we take them; but if not, they can sell them freely. In that land, boys are also raised in water such that, on account of the stones found, they may live for a length of three or four months completely under the water.

Truly, beyond the river of stones are the 10 tribes of the Jews, who although they contrive kings for themselves, they are in fact our servants and are tributaries to our excellency.

In another certain province, next to the dry zone,[27] are worms that are called in our language 'salamanders'. These worms cannot live except in fire, and they make certain little skins around themselves, like the other worms which make silk. These little skins are studiously worked by the ladies of our palace, and from them we have clothes and garments for our excellency's every use. These garments are not washed except by burning them strongly in fire.

Our serenity abounds in gold and silver and precious stones, elephants, dromedaries, camels, and dogs. Our gentleness takes in all foreign guests and pilgrims. There is no poor man among us. Neither thief nor robber is found among us, nor does any sycophant have a place there, and nor is there greed. No division exists among us. Our men abound in all riches. We have small and vile horses.[28] We believe that no one is equal to us in riches or in number of peoples.

*Interpolation E*

In addition, amongst the other marvels of our land, which seem extremely incredible to men, we have five incredibly virtuous stones the size of hazelnuts. The nature of the first of these is such that if it is placed beneath the sky in either winter or summer, it creates for so much as 10 miles around itself such a most bitter cold that accordingly no man or animal can suffer half a day's journey without at once crowding together and dying. The nature of the second stone is such that, similarly in either winter or summer, if it is placed beneath the sky, it creates such a great and most fervent heat that no living creature can suffer half a day's journey without being thoroughly consumed and turned to ashes, like a stirrup consumed in a kiln of blazing fire. The third stone is in the middle of the other two. It is neither cold nor hot but is cold *and* hot; compared to the other two it is so tempered that it controls itself and its instability such that its fierceness can in no way harm anyone. The fourth stone is such that, if it is placed beneath the sky at midnight in great darkness, it creates a light of such greatness and brilliance for 10 miles around itself that nothing so small or minute can escape without it being able to be seen most clearly, as though it were midday with the sun shining

most brightly. Truly, the fifth is such that if it were placed beneath the sky at midday, with the sun blazing, similarly for 10 miles around itself it makes such a pitch black darkness that accordingly no mortal can see anything, nor indeed can he know or perceive where he is. In fact, if these stones are placed beneath the sky, as has been said, they have the aforesaid virtues; but truly, if they are hidden, they have neither these virtues nor any others; on the contrary, they are so ugly that they seem to have no power whatsoever.

We have another five stones, three of which are consecrated and two of which are not consecrated. The first of these two is naturally of such virtue that if it is placed into a vase full of water, from that water is immediately made the whitest milk, the sweetest and most pleasant to eat and drink, indeed better and pleasanter than that of any animal. Truly, if the stone is taken out of the water, whatever was there remains. The nature of the second stone is such that if it is similarly placed in a vase full of water, from that water is immediately made the most undiluted wine, greatly fragrant and certainly the most greatly pleasing to drink. A better and sweeter wine than that is never found made from the vine or the tree. And if the stone is lifted from the water, whatever was there remains, as was said above about the other stone. The first of the consecrated stones is consecrated such that if it is placed in water in which there are fish, as soon as it is placed in the water, all the fish, wherever they were in the water, come as quickly as possible to it and cannot be separated from it for as long as it is in the water. Such is the virtue of this stone's consecration. And then whoever wishes to catch fish may have however many small and large fish he desires, according to his will, without net and hook and with no other tool and without labour. Truly, when it is brought forth from the water, the fish recede wherever they wish. The second stone is consecrated such that if any hunter advancing through the forest drags this stone behind him tied with dragons' sinews, accordingly all beasts great and small – bears and lions, stags and roe deer, rabbits and foxes, wolves and other beasts – stopping straight away, follow that hunter wherever he goes; nor are they able to separate themselves from him for as long as he wishes to lead them. Such is the virtue of this stone's consecration. And then whoever wants any of those beasts may catch them without hindrance. Nor is it a strange thing, because the animals cannot defend themselves or go anywhere. Truly, when the stone is taken in and freed from the dragons' sinews and concealed in the pocket, the beasts go back wherever they wish. The third stone is consecrated in such a way that if it is sprinkled with the hot blood of a lion, such a fire comes out of it that it would thoroughly consume with ease (as though they were a candlewick) water and stones, earth, and other

things which are placed opposite it; nor can it be extinguished in any way, unless the stone is sprinkled with the hot blood of a dragon. In fact, when it pleases our majesty to make such a fire, we have lions and dragons prepared, by whose blood the fire is indeed kindled and extinguished. Of course, we burn up our enemies with such a fire, if any ever appear to us.

*Uninterpolated*

When we proceed to war against our enemies, in place of flags we make to be carried before us in separate carts thirteen great and exceptionally tall crosses made from gold and precious stones, and following each one of them are 10,000 knights and 100,000 armoured foot soldiers, besides the others who have been assigned to baggage, chariots and carrying the army's provisions. Truly, when we ride out normally, a wooden cross goes before our majesty, decorated with no paint or gold or gems, so that we may always be mindful of the passion of our lord Jesus Christ, and one golden vase full of earth so that we may recognise that our flesh will be returned to its origin, that is, the earth. And another silver vase full of gold is carried before us, so that everyone knows that we are lord of lords. Our magnificence abounds and excels in all riches that are in the world.

Amongst us no one lies, nor is anyone able to lie. And if someone begins to lie there, he immediately dies, that is, among us he is considered to be a dead man, nor is mention made of him among us, that is, he receives no further honour among us. We all follow truth and love each other. There is no adulterer among us. No vice reigns among us.

Every year, we visit the body of St Daniel the prophet in the Babylonian desert with a great army, and they are all armed on account of the deer and the other serpents called 'terrentes' [frightening]. In our land, fish are captured with whose blood purple dye is made. We have many fortifications [as well as] the strongest and most diverse peoples. We rule over the Amazons and also the Bragmanni.[29]

*Interpolation D*

The Amazons are women who have among them a queen, whose residence is an island that extends for 1,000 miles in every direction, and is surrounded on all sides by a certain river that has neither beginning nor end, like a ring without a gemstone. The width of this river is 1,565 stades.[30] In fact, in this river there are fish that are the sweetest to eat and the easiest to catch. There are also other fish there,

shaped like large hands, having four well-placed feet, a decently long neck, a small head, pointed ears and most suitably flat tails. In truth, these fish are so naturally civilised, as though they had been brought up by men, and so swift in speed like sea winds; they voluntarily offer themselves to capture on the sea shore, two at a time, that is, one male and one female. When the Amazons want to, they ride them all day, and at night they allow them to return to the water, for the fish cannot live for more than a day without water. There are also others shaped like most beautiful palfreys or mules, and thick like flat-fish, which they ride similarly for the whole day; they permit them to go back to the water at a late hour. There are others shaped like cows and donkeys, with which they plough, sow, and carry wood, stones, and whatever they want for the whole day, and at night they live in the water until another day. There are also others shaped like small and large dogs, and they are so swift in speed and well taught in hunting that no beast can flee before them or hide without being immediately captured. There are others like most beautiful hawks or kites, shaped like falcons, and they are most beautiful, but if they were changed ten or twenty times,[31] they would be so strong and swift in flight that accordingly no bird is able to flee from them, without being immediately captured. The husbands of the aforesaid women [the Amazons] do not live with them, nor do they dare to come to them unless they wish to die immediately, but they live on the farther bank of the aforesaid river. Indeed, it was established that any man who goes onto the aforesaid island would die on that day. In fact, the women go to them and remain with them for seven or fifteen days or more, and afterwards the men allow them to return to other lands. When boys are born, the women raise them up to seven years of age, and afterwards they hand them over to their fathers. Truly, when girls are born, the women keep them with themselves. These Amazons are most skilled in war, and the best at using the bow, lances, and spears. They have silver weapons, because they have no other money or metal except for silver, from which they make ploughshares, mattocks, axes, and other instruments. They also have the strongest and swiftest land horses, upon whom they fight, and when they fight in these fights…[32] in order to wound and kill their enemies in front and behind and from all sides. Accordingly, they circle them on their horses faster than a potter's wheel is spun when it is rotating at the greatest speed. Indeed, they run on their own feet in such a way that, if they began to move at the same time as an arrow had been fired from a bow, by the swiftest course they would catch it in their hand before it fell to the earth. When it pleases our highness to put together an army out of these women, we lead a million or more of them against our enemies, if we so desire. Truly, their husbands follow

them, not to fight, but to adore them when they return victorious from the fight.

The Bragmanni are numberless and simple men who lead a pure life. They do not desire to have more than what the law of nature requires. They have compassion for and support all things. They say that what is not necessary is superfluous. They are saints living in the flesh. Almost all of Christendom is everywhere sustained by their sanctity and justice, so we believe, and it is defended by their prayers, lest it be conquered by the devil. These men serve our majesty with their prayers alone, nor do we wish to have anything else from them.

*Uninterpolated*

Truly, the palace that our sublimeness lives in resembles in image and likeness the palace that the apostle Thomas designed for Gundoforus, the king of the Indians; its workshops and other buildings are similar in every way. The rafters, beams, and cross-beams are all made of *shittim* wood.[33] The same palace is covered with ebony, so that it cannot be burnt by any accident. Truly, above the roof at the ends of the palace are two golden apples, and in each of them there are two carbuncles, so that the gold shines by day and the carbuncles glow at night. The larger doors of the palace are made of sardonyx inlaid with serpent's horn, so that no one can secretly enter with poison; the other doors are made of ebony; the windows are made of crystal. The tables at which our court eats are made of either gold or amethyst; the columns that support the tables are made of ivory. In front of our palace is a certain street in which our justice is accustomed to watch people who have been victorious in a duel. The concrete is made of onyx and the walls are inlaid with onyx, so that the soldiers' spirits might grow by the power of that stone.

In the aforesaid palace of ours, no light is kindled at night unless it is fuelled by balsam. The room in which our sublimeness rests is decorated with marvellous workmanship, with gold and every kind of stone. In truth, wherever there is onyx near the decorations, around it there are four carnelians, so that the evil of the onyx might be tempered by their virtue. The balsam always burns in that room. Our bed is made of sapphire because of its virtue of chastity. We have the most beautiful women, but they do not come to us except for the sake of begetting sons four times per year, and sanctified by us in this way, like Bathsheba by David, each one returns to their place.[34]

Our court eats once per day. Every day, 30,000 men eat at our table, besides those coming and going. And every day all these men receive gifts from our vault, both horses and other expenses. This table

is made of precious emerald; two columns made of amethyst support it. The virtue of this stone permits no one sitting at the table to be intoxicated.

*Interpolation D*

And because our mill-houses are often submerged by an inundation of water, not far from our city of Bibric we had a mill-house without water built, with an oven fitting for our majesty, so that our court's bread may never be insufficient because of the infinite multitude of people who come and stay with us. This is how. Truly we made to be erected four great and exceptionally tall columns made of purest gold which were arranged into a square on a certain plain, with a distance between them of more than twenty feet. Their length is fourty cubits,[35] their width ten. Indeed, between and above these columns we had a house like a round ball built, which is level and joined at the tops of the columns in such a way that nothing goes higher than the columns, nor do the columns go any higher. In this house there are no windows or doors. Below the house are two great millstones made of adamantium stone, best disposed for grinding; in fact no stone or fire or iron can break this stone apart. Truly, underneath the house below the columns is a great wheel with a mighty spindle made of the yellowest gold, fashioned and arranged just as in any other mill-houses.

*Interpolation D*
This wheel spins so strongly by the virtue of the stone that is in the concrete that if anyone wishes to look at it with steady eyes, he would immediately lose his sight. Similarly, by the virtue of the stones, the grain ascends through a certain column into the mill-house, and through another column flour descends into the circle where bread is made by the bakers, placed into an oven made of mineral, and cooked. The concrete of the oven is made of green topaz, which is naturally cold, in order that the heat of the mineral might be tempered. Otherwise, the bread would not be cooked but burnt. Such is the heat of the mineral. The length of this furnace is 40 cubits; its width is 15. There are 10 doors here and there, and for each door there are 10 bakers, and each of the bakers has, as a gift from the bakery, possession of 500 knights and many other riches. Truly, the master of the bakers has as much as all the bakers, and according to honour the leadership has scarcely more than the others. The millers are the same, and they are all equal in favour to our bakers, because if the bakers were poorer than the millers, or the millers were poorer than the bakers, jealousy and tension could rise between them at any time. And therefore it pleased our majesty to make them equal in number and favour.

*Interpolation E*
When it spins, the millstone is swifter in speed than can be believed or imagined; it spins invisibly. But hear how the wheel spins: indeed, a long way from that mill-house, almost twenty miles to the east, upon the highest mountains, on which there is always the most violent wind, we had created underground a route great and most large at the entrance. We also made 2,000 other smaller routes all of which

correspond beneath the earth to this greater route, which is led to the mill-house beneath the earth. The wind enters through these routes and departs through a golden column, which is placed opposite the wheel, and which is extended up to the same wheel, and it is wide below and thin above, so that the wind may beat the wheel stronger and harder and with greater vigour, and make it spin faster. Similarly, we made others to be created from the west, south and north, so that, no matter what direction the wind comes from, it may make the mill-house spin ceaselessly and without interruption upon the round or spherical house, which is not larger than those millstones that are inside are wide. And there is neither door nor window there, lest the wind might ever blow away and scatter the flour. We undertook to create another large and high house, to reach which one must climb 140 steps, and to go down from the other part one must descend the same number of steps, some of which are made of gold, others of silver, yet others of precious stones variously arranged amongst themselves. The width of this ladder is 10 forearms, and this is plenty, because it carries greater than a wagon laden with grain. The roosters who are raised on a certain island of ours, who are larger than ostriches, easily carry provisions through this ladder to the mill-house above. In the concrete of this house, which is the ceiling of the mill-house, is a certain great hole, through which the grain is sent into the mill-house, to which task
200 men are assigned every day, nor are they able to supply such an amount as would satisfy the mill- house. Also, beneath the columns in that mill-house below there is another hole, in that place from which the mill-house spits out the flour, which then descends into the bakery through a great and golden molten column that is connected to the hole in such a way that no one can ever understand in any way. In this mill, our furnace is marvellously made. For the furnace is made of precious stones and gold on the outside, and inside the ceiling and walls are made of a white stone, whose nature is such that when it is heated once, from that moment on it will be forever mercilessly hot without fire. Truly, the concrete is made of incorruptible gold, the strength of which is such that it cannot be broken by iron, fire, or any substance without goat's blood.* And so, beneath this layer of concrete, we had another layer of concrete made.

*[Note:* Goat's blood was believed to be able to crack diamonds. This claim is made by two highly influential texts: Augustine's* De Civitate Dei, *and the widely-popular thirteenth-century* Secretum Secretorum. *Roger Bacon, however, refuted the claim based on his own experience: Keagan Brewer,* Wonder and Skepticism in the Middle Ages *(forthcoming, September 2015), chapter 7.]*

*Uninterpolated*

In front of the gates of our palace, next to the place where fighters struggle in a duel, is a mirror of exceptional height, to reach which one must ascend 125 steps. Truly, the steps are made of porphyry, partly of snake-skin and alabaster from the lower third. For the middle third, they are made of crystal stone and sardonyx. Truly, for the upper third they are made of amethyst, amber, jasper, and leopard-skin. Truly, the mirror is supported by a single column. Truly, upon this lies a base, upon the base lie two columns, upon which likewise

lies another base, and upon that lie four columns, upon which likewise lies another base, and upon that lie eight columns, upon which likewise lies another base, and upon that lie 16 columns, upon which likewise lies another base, upon which lie 32 columns, upon which likewise lies another base, and upon that lie 64 columns, upon which likewise lies another base, upon which likewise lie 64 columns, upon which likewise lies another base, and upon which lie 32 columns. And in this way the columns diminish by descending just as they increase by ascending, all the way down to one. The columns and bases are also of the same kind of stones as the steps by which one ascends to them. Truly, at the top of the highest column is the mirror that is consecrated by such art that all war machines and all things that occur for us and against us in the provinces adjacent and subjected to us can be most clearly seen and known by those looking upon it. But it is kept safe by day and night by 12,000 soldiers, lest perhaps it could be broken or struck down by some calamity.

Every month seven kings, 62 dukes, and 365 counts serve us at our table, each one according to their rank, with the exception of those who are assigned to various duties at our court. Every day at our table 12 archbishops eat on our right-hand side, and on our left-hand side 20 bishops eat, besides the patriarch of St Thomas, and the archpriest [*protopapaten*] of Samarkand and the head archpriest [*archiprotopapaten*] of Susa, where the throne and seat of our glory and imperial palace resides.[36] Each one of these men in turn returns every month to their own house. The others never depart from our side. Truly, the abbots serve us in our chapel according to the number of days in the year, and every month they return to their own lands, and others return to the same duty of the chapel for the same number of days each kalends.

*Interpolation B*

We also have another palace not of greater length, but of greater height and beauty, which was made through a revelation, which , before we were born, appeared to our father, who, because of the sanctity and justice which flourished marvellously within him, was called Quasideus [God-like]. For in fact this was said to him in sleep: ‘Make a palace for your son, who will be born to you, who will be king of earthly kings and lord of lords of the whole earth. And that palace will have such grace bestowed upon it by God…

*Interpolation B*

… that no one will ever be hungry there, no one will be weakened, still no one stepping inside will be able to die on that day on which he entered. And if anyone had the strongest hunger and was weakened [almost] to death, if he entered the

palace and stood there for a little while, he would depart so sated, as though he had eaten from a hundred dishes, and so healthy as though he had suffered no illness in his life'.

*Interpolation C*
… that no one who entered on that day will become ill, no one will be hungry, nor will anyone standing there die'.

*Interpolation C*

And also, there will spring forth in that palace a certain fountain most tasty and fragrant above all other things, which will never depart from the palace, but will flow through the palace from one corner where it arises to another corner on the opposite side, and there the earth will receive it, and beneath the earth it will be turned back to its source, in the same way that the sun is turned back beneath the earth from the west to the east. Indeed, it will taste in the mouth of those tasting it like whatever they desire to eat or drink. Accordingly, the palace will be filled with such a fragrance as if all kinds of sauce, spice and oil were placed there and stirred up, and more things than all these. Indeed, if any starving person tasted of this fountain three times daily for three years, three months, three weeks, three days, and three hours, and on the third hour he tasted it so that he tasted it three times neither before that hour or after it, but in the space which is between the beginning and the end of each one of those three hours, accordingly he would not die before 300 years, three months, three weeks, three days, and three hours, and he would be forever at the age of young adulthood. Later on, whoever lives for such a length of time, on the final day of his foretold days, he will gather his parents and friends and say to them: 'My friends and neighbours, behold! now I will die before long. I ask you to close a tomb over me, and pray for me'. Of course, after he says this, he will immediately enter the tomb and, saying goodbye to them, he will lay himself down as though he wished to sleep and in order to fulfil the prediction: 'now with his time ended, he will return his soul to its creator'.[37] But seeing this, all the loved ones mourn over the body, as is the usual custom, and after closing the tomb they commit him to the Lord and go back.

*Interpolation E*

And because this may happen to you, let there be this sign for you: In a plain which is called Rimoc is the certain great and tall stone which Porus, the king of the Indians, marvellously made to be pulled to the ground and made into a square. The height of this stone is 100 paces, and the width is 50, and in all directions from this stone, this plain extends for almost twenty miles. Indeed, in this plain there is

neither tree nor stone; there is neither hill nor valley, but there are many fountains and sweetest streams there, flowing everywhere throughout the plain, and all kinds of fragrant herbs are discovered there. On this night there will spring forth above this stone such a great and excellent tree of such size and quality as has never been seen since the beginning of the world, nor will there be one before the end. No bird will go towards it, lest it might be disfigured in some way. In addition, none of its leaves, which are most thick and most bright like gold, will fall at any time. Truly, at the top of this tree will spring forth a certain most straight twig without branches, without leaves, 100 feet high and so thick that it takes two men to be able to embrace it. At the head of this twig springs forth a certain incredibly great and most bright apple, whose brilliance no one will be able to endure with their eyes, unless he placed his hand in front, as though he wished to gaze at the sun. And wherever they were or stood admiring this apple, if they were unwell, they will be completely healed there by the sweetness of its fragrance, or if they were weary, they will immediately become stronger than they were before. If they were famished or parched of thirst, they will be so sated without delay that they will not be hungry nor will they be thirsty anymore for up to 18 days.

*Interpolation B*

When dawn broke, Quasideus, my father, completely terrified of such a vision, rose and…

*Interpolation C*

although he pondered it and was very concerned, he heard a heavenly voice which the others who were with him also heard, which said: ‘O Quasideus, do what was told to you; do not hesitate in any way, because all things will be as they were predicted to you’. Certainly, having been moved towards this voice, my father was immediately consoled and…

*Interpolation B*

… undertook to have a palace made, in whose composition there is for cement nothing but precious stones and the best molten gold. Its sky, that is, the ceiling, is made of the brightest sapphire, and the clearest topazes are placed here and there so that the purest sapphires are as to the sky and the topazes light up the palace like stars. Truly, the concrete is made of great planks of crystal. There is no room or

other division lower than the palace. Fifty columns shaped like needles made of the purest gold are distributed evenly around the palace. There is one of these in a certain corner, resting below where the others are located. The length of one of these columns is 60 cubits; the width is so much that two men are able to encircle it with their outstretched arms, and a certain one has at its peak a carbuncle so great that it acts as a great amphora through which the palace is illuminated, like the world is illuminated by the sun. Why might the columns be like sharp needles? It is evidently for this reason: because, if they were equally large at the top and bottom, the concrete and the whole palace would not be equally illuminated by the splendour of the carbuncles. Indeed, the brightness there is so great that nothing so small or so minute could be so subtly conceived if it were on the concrete, without it being able to be seen by anyone. There is no window nor any hole there, lest the brightness of the carbuncles and other stones might possibly be obscured in some way by the brightness of the most fair sky and the sun.

*Interpolation C*

There is one door in the palace placed towards the east, which is made of the purest and brightest crystal, surrounded by the yellowest gold, and its height is 130 cubits. When our sublimeness comes to the palace, it opens and closes by itself, without anyone touching it. But when others enter, the doorkeepers open and close it. Accordingly, whenever we are in that city which is called Briebric, where the palace is, every day we enter that palace to drink from the fountain. Truly, when we ride on horseback, we make it so that some water from that fountain is carried with us wherever we go, and every day we, when hungry, sip three times, as was instructed in our father's vision.

*Interpolation B*

On the day of our nativity and whenever we are crowned, we enter that palace, and so long as we are inside, whenever we had been able to eat there, we leave there satisfied, as if we were full of every kind of food.

*Interpolation D*

Next to this palace, we have a glass chapel not made by hand, more marvellous than all marvels. On the first day of our nativity, when there was nothing there, it appeared where it now is, to the

glory and credit of our name. In fact, it was made thus by divine arrangement: if three men enter it, it is full; if ten or twenty enter it, it grows and is full; if 100 or 1,000 men enter it, it grows and is full, and if 10,000 or 20,000 or 100,000 enter it, it grows and is full. From three or above up to infinity, it always grows and is full. And just as it grows and is always full with men going in up to infinity, likewise it shrinks down to three and is always full. Truly, from three and below it neither grows nor shrinks. This in fact serves to represent the holy and undivided trinity, because, just as the chapel suffers neither increase nor decrease from three people or less, so too the holy trinity suffers neither increase nor decrease, that is, it does not allow more or less parts than three. In fact, it always consists of three persons, namely the father, the son, and the holy spirit, the three persons which are the one true God and the one divine essence.

The chaplains of this chapel are all castrated, and all who must be chaplains in that chapel are castrated from [the time that they suckled at] their mother's breasts. In fact, these men who present the divine offices to our God in such a holy and most sacred place must be virgins and cleansed of every defect. Truly, at the appointed hour when they must enter this chapel to celebrate the divine offices, they strip themselves of everything beforehand in a certain room next to the chapel, which we had built for this reason. And stripped in this way, they stand at the threshold of the chapel, where they receive marvellous and indescribable clothes, in which they solemnly and devoutly celebrate the divine offices. If you ask where these clothes come from and how they are made, and from where or by whom they are sold, neither those who receive them nor any other mortal can say how or even know how in any way. We know this much: that they are so bright and splendid that no one can look at them without their eyes being blinded. Mark this! After the divine celebrations, where they took up the clothes, at that very place, not knowing how or in what way, they take them off, and, receiving their own clothes in the aforesaid room, they return to the monastery that is nearby that place. It would be tedious to describe the riches and size of this monastery. It is possible to know one thing: that no kingdom can equal it in riches.

In fact, we have a great tree, at the top of which is a certain twig with an apple above it. Truly, a certain most bright sap flows out ceaselessly from this aforesaid tree through one single hole, which, when it hardens, a certain stone is made from it, which is called 'stintochim'. Its nature is such that, just as water extinguishes fire, and as fire burns up a candle, so the aforesaid sap consumes iron, and if it is dragged by ship through the sea and other rivers from shore to shore, certainly it divides the water so that anyone can cross with dry feet from one side to the other without doubt. In fact, from this sap,

when it is young, we have vases, rings, and whatever we want made, as though they were made from the softest wax. Later on, because of the strength of this stone, we have arms made from our aforesaid sap, namely shield, lance, sword, helmet, chain mail, and greave, and also spurs, which indeed shine by day and night, like the two lamps of the sky. Some wise men of the Indians say that the aforesaid tree signifies our person, because, just as that tree surpasses others in fruit and fragrance, so our person does not have like or equal in this world. They say that the twig at the top of this tree signifies our power, because, just as it is high and most strong, so our power is high, no indeed it is the highest, and it is so strong that it cannot be surpassed by anyone in any way. Truly, they assert similarly that the apple at the head of the twig designates our justice, because, just as the ill are cured by the sweetness of its fragrance, just as those who are failing are restored, and just as the hungry and thirsty are sated, the same [can be said] for our justice. And, what is more, men live greater and longer by it. Yet others say that the aforesaid tree signifies the world. For indeed, they designate the twig to be equal to our person, because, just as the tree lies beneath the twig, so the whole sphere or the world lies beneath our person. Truly, the apple, as was said, signifies our justice.

We have another palace that was owned by Porus, king of the Indians, from whose lineage all our land and family descend.[38] Indeed, in this palace there are many things thoroughly incredible to human minds. There are, for example, 500 golden columns there with golden capitals, and golden vines hang between these columns, with golden leaves and branches, some of crystal, others of sapphires, others made from pearls, still others made from emerald; and its walls are covered with golden plates, which are as thick as human fingers. These walls are decorated with pearls, carbuncles, and every precious stone. The doors of this same palace are of ebony and covered all over with golden plating. The rooms are of *shittim* wood[39] and every work that can ever be made of gold and silver and decorated with every precious stone. In the hall of this palace there are twenty great golden statues, and below them are the same number of great silver trees shining like the brightest lights, in which reside all kinds of golden birds, and each one has a colour following its genus, and they are so skilled in the musical art that, when King Porus wished, they all sang together following their nature or each one sang by himself, one after the other. Similarly, the aforesaid musical statues were so fashioned that they sung at the king's desire more sweetly and more pleasantly than can be believed. And, what is more marvellous than all marvels, they seem to make merry in the manner of actors, and twist here and there. Certainly, in winter and summer, when it pleases our highness,

we make these statues and birds sing and make merry; the sweetness and pleasantness of the little song is so great and so excellent that it makes its hearers fall asleep uncontrollably, and they are made to be somewhat beyond their wits.

*Interpolation E*

We now wish to relate to your goodwill something about the food that our highness eats. We say 'something' because our food is made in many places and in many ways, so it would be too tedious to describe each one. For the present, you may know this one thing – that our food is not cooked at a fire, lest it might possibly be defiled in some way with smoke or fumes or ashes or even charcoal. For in fact we have a certain stone which is called 'zimur', which is cut from a certain mountain which is called with the same name 'zimurc'; its nature is so hot that certainly no mortal can touch it in any way, unless he wears iron gloves on his hands. Indeed, vases gilded on the inside are made from this stone, in which our food is cooked without fire. We also have a certain fountain that boils continuously, unremittingly, and naturally, making it always so hot that the food which is cooked at its heat is not cooked less or worse, but better by far and purer than that which is cooked at a fire. Certainly, the virtue of this fountain's waters is so great and so excellent that, if any is lifted from the fountain, it always boils and always becomes hotter, and the longer it is carried, it always boils and thus always becomes, from the heat, most hot. Naturally, from this water, great golden shells or gilded vessels are filled up, in which are set great golden tripods. Above any of these are placed the aforesaid stone vases in which our food is delicately cooked without smoke, with the heat of the water more than that of the vases without fire. Truly, when we ride on horseback, we make to be carried with us enough of this water with these vases so that, wherever we are, our food is prepared in the same way as was said above.

*Interpolation C*

If you ask a second time, since the creator of all things made us most almighty and most glorious above all mortals,

*Uninterpolated*

Your prudence ought not question why our highness does not allow himself to be called by a name more dignified than 'priest' [i.e. the 'Prester' in Prester John]. We have many ministers in our court who,

such a great number, with dignified name and office, observe the ecclesiastical dignity, and they are also better provided than us in divine offices. Indeed, our waiter is a noble and a king, our cup-bearer is an archbishop and a king, our chamberlain is a bishop and a king, our marshal is a king and archimandrite, the head chef is a king and abbot. And on that account, our highness is not permitted to name himself with the same names or to be distinguished with those ranks with which our court seems to be full, and therefore he chose the greater thing: to be called by a lesser name and a more inferior position on account of humility.

*Interpolation C*

We cannot at present say enough to you about our glory and power. But when you come to us, you will say, because it is true, that we are the lord of lords of the entire earth. In the meantime, you may know this trifle, that…

*Uninterpolated*

Our land extends for almost four months in one direction in breadth; truly, in the other direction no one can know how far our dominion stretches. If you can count the stars of the sky and the sand of the sea, count our dominion and our power as well.

*Interpolation D*

Dated in our city of Bibric, on the 15th of the Kalends of April in the 51st year of our nativity. In confirmation: A certain cardinal, Stephen by name, said under the oath of his faith and pronounced openly to everyone that all the things which were stated above as though they were unbelievable are in fact the highest truth.

*Interpolation E*

Here ends the Book or the History of Prester John, which was translated from Greek into Latin by Archbishop Christian of Mainz. This Christian was succeeded by Archbishop Conrad. This Manuel reigned in Greece from 1144 A.D. to 1180 A.D.

**Papa Alexander III, Epistola ad Iohannem, Regem Indorum**

*Date:* Probably 27th Sept., 1177[40]

**1.** Alexander episcopus, servus servorum Dei, karissimo in Christo filio Iohanni, illustri et magnifico Indorum regi,[41] salutem et apostolicam benedictionem. **2.** Apostolica sedes, cui licet immeriti praesidemus, omnium in Christo credentium caput est et magistra, domino attestante, qui ait beato Petro, cui licet indigni successimus: *Tu es Petrus et super hanc petram aedificabo ecclesiam meam et portae inferi non praevalebunt adversus* eam.[42] **3.** Hanc siquidem petram Christus esse voluit in ecclesiae fundamental, quam praesciverat nullis ventorum turbinibus nullisque tempestatibus quatiendam. **4.** Et ideo non inmerito beatus Petrus, super quem fundavit ecclesiam, ligandi atque solvendi specialiter et praecipue inter apostolos alios recipere meruit potestatem. **5.** Cui dictum est a domino: *Tibi dabo claves regni caelorum. Et quodcumque ligaveris super terram, erit ligatum et in caelis; et quodcumque solveris super terram, erit solutum et in caelis.*

**6.** Audiveramus utique iampridem referentibus multis et etiam fama communi, quomodo, cum sis christianam religionem professus, piis velis operibus indesinenter intendere, et circa ea tuum animum geras, quae Deo grata sunt et accepta. **7.** Sed et dilectus filius noster, magister Philippus, medicus et familiaris noster, qui de intentione pia et proposito tuo cum magnis et honorabilibus viris tui regni se in partibus illis verbum habuisse proponit, sicut vir providus et discretus, circumspectus et prudens, constanter nobis et sollicite retulit, se manifestius ab his audivisse, quod tuae voluntatis sit et propositi erudiri catholica et apostolica disciplina, et ad hoc ferventer intendas, ut tu et terra tuae sublimitati commissa nil unquam videamini in fide vestra tenere, quod a doctrina sedis apostolicae dissentiat quomodolibet vel discordet. **8.** Super quo sane tibi, sicut karissimo filio, plurimum in domino congaudemus et ei, a quo cuncta bona procedunt, inmensas gratiarum exsolvimus actiones, vota votis et preces precibus adiungentes, ut qui dedit tibi nomen christianitatis suscipere, menti tuae per suam ineffabilem pietatem inspiret, quod omnino velis sapere, quae super omnibus articulis fidei tenere debet religio christiana. **9.** Non enim vere potest de christiana professione sperare salutem, qui eidem professioni verbo et opere non concordat, quia non sufficit cuilibet nomine christiano censeri, qui de fide sentit aliud quam habeat catholica et apostolica disciplina, iuxta illud, quod dominus in evangelio dicit: *Non omnis, qui dicit mihi ≪domine, domine≫ intrabit in regnum caelorum, sed qui facit voluntatem patris mei, qui in caelis est.* **10.** Illud autem nichilominus ad commendationem tuae virtutis accedit, quod, sicut praedictus magister Philippus se a tuis asserit audivisse, ferventi desiderio cuperes in urbe habere ecclesiam, et Jerusalem altare aliquod, ubi viri prudentes de regno tuo manere possent et apostolica plenius instrui disciplina, per quos postmodum tu et homines regni tui doctrinam ipsam reciperent

facilius et tenerent.

**11.** Nos autem, qui licet insufficientibus meritis in beati Petri cathedra positi, *sapientibus et insipientibus,* divitibus et pauperibus, iuxta apostolum nos recognoscimus *debitores,* de salute tua et tuorum omnimodam gerimus sollicitudinem, et vos ab his articulis, in quibus erratis a christiana et catholica fide, prompto animo, prout tenemur ex ministerio suscepti regiminis, volumus revocare, cum ipse dominus beato Petro, quem omnium apostolorum principem fecit, dixerit: *Et tu conversus aliquando confirma fratres tuos.* **12.** Licet autem grave nimis videatur et laboriosum existere, ad praesentiam tuam inter tot labores et varia rerum ac locorum discrimina, inter linguas barbaras et ignotas, quemlibet a nostro latere destinare, considerato tamen offitii nostri debito et tuo pio proposito et intentione pensata, praefatum Philippum, medicum et familiarem nostrum, virum utique discretum, circumspectum et providum, ad tuam magnitudinem mittimus, de Jhesu Christi misericordia confidentes, quod, si volueris in eo proposito et intentione persistere, quam te inspirante domino intelleximus concepisse, de articulis christianae fidei, in quibus tu et tui a nobis discordare videamini, in Christo per dei gratiam eruditus, nichil prorsus timere poteris, quod de errore tuam vel tuorum salutem praepediat vel in vobis nomen christianitatis obfuscet.

**13.** Rogamus itaque regiam excellentiam tuam, monemus et hortamur in domino, quatinus eundem Philippum pro reverentia beati Petri et nostra sicut virum honestum, discretum et providum, et a nostro latere destinatum, debita benignitate suscipias et reverenter et devote pertractes, et, si tuae voluntatis est et propositi, sicut omnino esse debet, ut erudiaris apostolica disciplina, super his, quae idem Philippus ex nostra tibi parte proponet, ipsum diligenter audias et exaudias, et personas honestas et litteras tuo sigillo signatas, quibus propositum et voluntatem tuam possimus plene cognoscere, ad nos cum ipso transmittas, quia, quanto sublimior et maior haberis et minus de divitiis et potentia tua videris inflatus, tanto libentius tam de concessione ecclesiae in urbe quam etiam de conferendis altaribus in ecclesia beatorum Petri et Pauli et Jerusalem in ecclesia dominici sepulcri, et in aliis, quae iuste quaesiveris, tuas curabimus peticiones admittere et efficatius exaudire, utpote qui desiderium tuum super hoc, quod multa commendatione dignum existit, modis omnibus, quibus secundum Deum possumus, volumus promovere, et tuam et tuorum animas desideramus domino lucrafacere.

[Datum Venetiae, in Rivo Alto, quinto Kalendas Octobris.][43]

**Pope Alexander III, Letter to John, King of the Indians**

*Date:* Probably 27 September 1177[44]

*[This text is often regarded as a reply to the* Prester John Letter, *but that is emphatically not the case. Despite this, it presents a curious anomaly that a pope could write a letter to Prester John chastising his arrogance. It is dated to September 27th, probably in the year 1177. If the pope's messenger, Master Philip, did really go off in search of Prester John, then no further details are currently known of this expedition. A more detailed discussion of this problematic text can be found above on pp. 13–17.]*

Bishop Alexander, servant of the servants of God, to John, beloved in Christ the son, illustrious and magnificent king of the Indians, greetings and papal blessings. The papal seat, over which we preside, although [we are] unworthy, is the head and mistress of all those who believe in Christ, with the Lord bearing witness, He who said to blessed Peter, to whom we are successor, although [we are] unworthy: 'You are Peter [*Petrus*], and on this rock [*petram*] I will build my church, and the doors of Hell will not prevail against it'.[45] Indeed, Christ wanted this rock to be the foundation of the church, which he had aforeknown would be shaken neither by any tempest of winds nor any storm. And therefore not undeservedly blessed Peter, upon whom He founded the church, deserved to receive the power of binding and loosening first and foremost among the other apostles. The Lord said to him: 'To you I will give the keys to the kingdom of the heavens. And whatever you bind on earth will also be bound in the heavens; and whatever you loosen on earth will also be loosened in the heavens'.[46]

We had certainly heard a long time ago by many reports and also by common rumour how, although you are a person who professes the Christian religion, you ceaselessly wish to extend [yourself] with pious works, and may you commit your soul to these things, which are pleasing and acceptable to God. But also our beloved son, Master Philip, our doctor and familiar, who, out of pious intention and your proposition, relates that he had word with the great and honourable men of your kingdom in those parts, [and], like a foresightful and discerning man, circumspect and prudent, he constantly and anxiously reported to us that he heard the more obvious thing from these men, [namely] that it is of your will and proposition to be educated in the Catholic and papal teaching, and may you zealously exert [yourself] towards this [end], so that you and your land, having been united to the highest, may never be seen to hold in your faith that which dissents from or is in any way at variance with the doctrine of the papal seat.[47] Regarding this, we certainly rejoice for you greatly in the Lord, just as [we do] for the most beloved son, and we perform

immeasurable acts of grace for Him from whom all good things proceed, adding vows to vows and prayers to prayers, so that He who gave to you the name of Christianity to take up may, through His indescribable goodness, breathe into your mind that which you should absolutely want to taste of, which the Christian religion must hold above all articles of faith. Indeed, he who, declaring [himself to be] a Christian, is not in agreement in word and deed with this same declaration cannot truly hope for salvation, because it is not enough for anyone to be thought of as Christian in name, who has experience of a faith other than that which the Catholic and papal teaching holds, on account of that which the Lord says in the Gospel: 'Not all who say to me 'Lord, Lord' will enter into the kingdom of the heavens, but he who does the will of my father, who is in the heavens, [will]'.[48] But this nevertheless comes near to a commendation of your virtue, because, just as the aforesaid Master Philip asserts that he heard from your men [that] you wanted with fervent desire to have a church in the city [of Rome], and an altar in Jerusalem, where prudent men from your kingdom may be able to stay and be completely instructed in the papal teaching, after these things have been done, you and the men of your kingdom will be able to easily receive and hold that doctrine.

But although we are placed in blessed Peter's chair without deserving it, with wise men and foolish men, rich and poor,[49] on account of the apostle we recognise [our] obligations, [and so] we have concern for the salvation of you and your men, and we, with ready soul, wish to call you back from these articles in which you err from the Christian and Catholic faith, just as we are obliged to because of the position of the office that we have taken up, since the Lord said to blessed Peter, whom he made the leader of all the apostles: 'And you, having been once converted, strengthen your brothers'.[50] But although a very difficult and painstaking [task] seems to arise, to send someone from our side to your presence through such labours, various dangers, and different places, through barbarous and unknown languages, however with consideration of the debt of our office and your pious proposition and thoughtful intention, we, being confident in the mercy of Jesus Christ, are sending to your greatness the aforementioned Philip, our doctor and familiar, certainly a distinguished man, circumspect and foresightful, so that if you wish to persist in that proposition and intention, which we have realised you have received by the Lord breathing it into you, regarding the articles of the Christian faith in which you and your men seem to be at variance with us, once instructed in Christ through the grace of God, you will be able to fear absolutely nothing, which [at present] shackles the salvation of you and your men out of error, or darkens

the name of Christian for you.

Therefore, we ask your royal excellence, we admonish and exhort in the Lord, that you, out of respect for blessed Peter and ourselves, receive this same Philip with due kindness like an honest, distinguished, and foresightful man sent from our side, and treat him respectfully and faithfully, and, if it is your will and proposition, as it altogether should be, so that you may be taught the papal teaching, diligently listen to and heed those things that this Philip will put forward to you on our behalf, and send to us with him honest persons and letters signed with your seal, through which we will be able to know your proposition and desire fully, because you are [now] held [to be] so much higher and greater and seem [to be] less inflated by your riches and power, [and because you] rather [seem] more willing regarding yielding to the church in the city [of Rome] and also regarding the uniting of the altars in the churches of blessed Peter and Paul and in Jerusalem in the church of the Lord's sepulchre, and in the others which you will have rightly sought out, we will allow your requests and heed those which are more beneficial, as much as is your desire regarding this matter, which is worthy of much commendation, we wish to move forward in all ways in which we can, according to God, and we desire to make the souls of you and your men profit in the Lord.

Dated at Venice, on the Rivo Alto, the 5th of the kalends of October. [i.e. September 27th]

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1 Genesis 2.10–12.

2 The writer is here referring to a text known as the *Acts of Thomas.* This is an apocryphal life of Thomas written originally in Syriac in the third or fourth century, and later translated into Latin through Greek. see Albertus Klijn, *The Acts of Thomas* (Leiden, 1962), p. 8.

3 A *ciborium* is an architectural feature of medieval Catholic churches, a kind of ornate canopy supported by columns, usually placed over an altar or throne as a symbol of authority.

4 see footnote 2 above.

5 Other manuscript variants have 'Sainardos', 'sainar dictos' corrected to 'sainardos', and 'san iardos'

6 Otto earlier (on p. 354 of the edition) calls this bishop 'venerabilis Gabulensis episcopus N'. ('N., the venerable bishop of Jabala'). Paul Pelliot has shown that his visit to Rome was a real occurrence, providing other primary source evidence. However, the bishop's real name was Hugh, not Otto's 'N.' Paul Pelliot says *(Mélanges sur l'époque des croisades* (Paris, 1951), p. 30) that 'Otto de Freising avait dû oublier le nom' ('Otto of Freising must have forgotten the name'), however it seems more likely that the 'N.' is a scribal error from an original 'H.', given the orthographical similarities between the two.

7 Otto writes earlier (on p. 312–3 of the edition): 'Ipsi vero Persarum reges, sicut et nostri urbem regiam vel Aquisgrani, Ecbactani, quam Arfaxath in libro

Iudith fundasse legitur, lingua eorum Hani dictam, centum vel amplius, ut volunt, pugnatorum milia habentem, sedem regni sui constituerunt' ['Truly, just as we have set up Aachen as our royal city, so these kings of the Persians have established as the seat of their kingdom Ebactana, called Hami in their language, which Arfaxath founded, as is read in the book of Judith, [a city] which, so they maintain, has a hundred thousand or more fighting men'.] The biblical reference is to Judith 1:1. Hami is a city in the western Chinese province of Xīnjiāng, though it may have echoes of Patriarch John's Hulna, as in the *De Adventu,* see above pp. 34–8

[8] See Appendix 2 for full details.

[9] Zarncke: 'Die Lesung ist nicht ganz deutlich, das Wort steht nur in e1' [The reading is not very clear; the word is only in el]. I have ignored *hrodiones* in my translation.

[10] Zarncke: 'Hier scheint Etwas zu fehlen' [There appears to be something missing here].

[11] See Appendix 2 for full textual details.

[12] See Introduction, pp. 13–19.

[13] See above, pp. 12–13.

[14] While most manuscripts and textual variants had Manuel, some copies listed others as the addressee. Kurzfassung a had the letter being sent to 'Lord Manuel, Pope of Rome, Emperor of the Romans'. Bearbeitung II, the Hildesheimer Fassung, Bearbeitung III, and MS.17 had the missive being sent to Frederick (without specifying whether the first or second), while MSS. 131 and 172 clarified the recipient as Frederick 'Barbarubea'. Some manuscripts had the letter being sent to Manuel, then forwarded by him either to Frederick (MSS.91a, 168, 199) or to Pope Alexander (MSS. 131, 204b). Other manuscripts sent the letter to Emperor Charles IV (MS.44), 'the Pope' (MS.48), 'Michael' (MS.191), Emanuel King of Portugal (MS.179), or even more bizarrely 'Emonu Helironicos gubernatori' (MS.124), presumably a corruption of the uninterpolated text's 'Emanuel Romeon gubernatori'. See Wagner, *Die 'Epistolapresbiteri Johannis'*, pp. 25–132.

[15] These last two sentences present some difficulties to the translator. I have read *ierarcham* as *hierarcham* (bishop), *lechito* as *lecto* (herald), and *tigna* as *digna* (respect). Others have interpreted these passages differently. Alexander A. Vasiliev, in an unpublished work on Prester John, tentatively suggested the following translation: 'Receive the dignity of the hierarch in our name and use it for thy own sake, because we gladly use the vase of oil, in order that we mutually strengthen and corroborate our virtue. Do also respect our kingdom', using the manuscript variant *regna* (kingdom) for the latter. Slessarev points out that if *regna* were the initial reading, then there would be no reason for the multitude of scribal variations in extant manuscripts. He, rather, suggested *ierarcham* derived from the Greek *hieraciam* (hawkweed), and, following Vasiliev, that *lechito* was Greek *lechitus* (jar for unguents), and *tigna* was Greek *diadema* (diadem) thus making the translation read: 'Receive the hawkweed from us and use it for yourself, because we avail ourselves with pleasure of your jar of unguent, in order that we strengthen and corroborate our bodily vigour. Respect and consider also my diadem'. Slessarev, *Prester John: the Letter and the Legend,* pp. 44–5. I have not seen Vasiliev's unpublished paper, but have relied on Slessarev's quotation of it on p. 44.

[16] Sirach (a.k.a. Ecclesiasticus) 7.40: 'In all your acts, remember your end and for eternity you will not sin'.

[17] These animals appear to be authorial inventions. They may be hybrid creatures, e.g. *methagallinarii* may be a hybrid of *metagon* (hunting dog) and *gallinarii* (poultry), indicating something like 'attack chickens'. Regardless, it is clear by the number of scribal variations that the meanings of these animals were as obscure to medieval readers as they are to us. Other evidence affirming this can be found in the

vernacular translations. Rather than translating *methagallinarii, cametheternis,* and *thinsiretae* into French, Roau d'Arundel, the text's earliest translator, wrote: 'E d'autres bestes plus ke mil / K'en rumanz ne sai numer, / Pur çoe me les covient passer' ['And more than a thousand other beasts/which I do not know how to say in French / For which reason I'll have to pass them over']. Martin Gosman (ed.), *La Lettre du Pretre Jean*, ll.172–4, p. 124

18 The story of these gold-digging ants was popular in medieval bestiaries, and stems ultimately from Herodotus.

19 Usually translated misleadingly as 'liver sea', the *mare coagulatum* (the 'curdled sea' or 'congealed sea') is a common trope in medieval encyclopaedic traditions, both Latin and vernacular. The sea, usually held to be in the far north, and often described using adjectives like *pigrum* ('slow') and *concretum* ('thick') was conceptualised as a dangerous sea in which ships could not move properly. Rudolf Simek suggests that the *mare coagulatum* 'probably referred to the frozen polar sea'. Simek, Angela Hall (trans.), *Heaven and Earth in the Middle Ages: the Physical World before Columbus* (Woodbridge, 1996), p. 68.

20 Revelations 20:7–10

21 Quoting a ninth-century Irish poem by Donatus of Fiesole. In describing Ireland, he writes: 'nulla venena nocent nec serpens serpit in herba / nec conquesta canit garrula rana lacu' ['No poisons harm, nor does the serpent snake through the grass / Nor does the chattering frog sing laments in the lake']. F.J.E. Raby (ed.), *The Oxford Book of Medieval Latin Verse* (Oxford, 1959), p. 116

22 Slessarev has convincingly suggested that *assidios* is a Latinisation of the Greek *apsinthion* or *apsinthios* ('wormwood'). Slessarev, *Prester John: the Letter and the Legend,* p. 46

23 See Slessarev, *Prester John: the Letter and the Legend,* p. 43 for references to other literature on the *midriosi.*

24 Exodus 16:22–36

25 Genesis 3.19: '… for dust thou art, and unto dust thou shalt return'.

26 For the sandy sea, see Lowes, 'The Dry Sea and the Carrenare', *Modern Philology,* vol. 3 (1905), pp. 1–16

27 The dry zone, or torrid zone, often mentioned by encyclopaedists based on ancient Greek archetype, was essentially the concept of equatorial heat, which, taken to its logical extreme, translated into a dangerous and uninhabitable area of the earth scorched by the sun.

28 In later versions of the *Letter,* this reads 'Equos habemus multos et velocissimos' ['We have many and most speedy horses']. Zarncke, *Abh.1,* p. 928, footnote 46.s.

29 i.e. Hindus, knowledge of whom was minimal in medieval Europe, and largely based on the Alexander pseudepistolae.

30 One stade is an eighth of a mile, or 125 paces, making it, by conservative estimate, roughly three hundred modern kilometres.

31 Referring to the custom of changing to a new a horse when the rider's current one is tired, in order to prevent the steed from being worn out, thus significantly reducing travel times on long journeys.

32 Zarncke: 'Hier scheint Etwas zu fehlen' [There seems to be something missing here].

33 *Shittim* wood was the type of wood used to make the Ark of the Covenant in Deuteronomy 10:3

34 See 2 Samuel 11

35 A cubit being the length of one's elbow to the tip of the middle finger, or in modern reckoning roughly 50cm.

36 Samarkand is in modern Uzbekistan. Susa is modern Shush in southwestern

Iran. This is the earliest known reference to Samarkand in Western literature.

37 Ecclesiastes 12:7?

38 Porus was the King of India at the time of the invasion of Alexander the Great.

39 See footnote 33 above.

40 See above on p. 14 for a discussion of the date of this text.

41 One variant reads ‘sacerdotum sanctissimo’ (‘most holy priest’) in place of ‘illustri et magnifico Indorum regi’

42 Only the beginning of biblical quotations are given in the manuscripts.

43 This dating appears in only two copies of Alexander’s letter. See Zarncke, *Abh.1*, pp. 938–9

44 See above on p. 14 for a discussion of the date of this text.

45 Matthew 16.18

46 Matthew 16.19

47 The identity of this Master Philip remains elusive, if he existed at all. Bernard Hamilton and I are currently engaged in a project attempting to elucidate more information here.

48 Matthew 7.21

49 Romans 1.14

50 Luke 22.32

# Section 2 – Prester John and the Fifth Crusade (Early Thirteenth Century)

*The Fifth Crusade took place between 1217 and 1221 in two theatres: the Holy Land and Egypt. Belief in Prester John here had an important impact on world history, being partly responsible for the failure of the crusade as a whole. Whilst the Fifth Crusaders were in northern Egypt after having made a few conquests there, news reached them of the first conquests of Chingis Khan in Asia, which called to mind Prester John. Around the same time, the leaders of the Fifth Crusade discovered a book of prophecies in Egypt that said that a king from the west and a king from the east would meet in Jerusalem and destroy Islam forever. This they took to mean that Prester John was coming from the east to help them win the crusade (Holy Roman Emperor Frederick II was believed to be the king from the west; he too never arrived).*

*The leaders of the crusade waited some six months for Prester John to arrive, and wrote letters to the major political figures of the time in Europe, including Pope Honorius III, informing them that Prester John was on his way. But when nothing eventuated, the crusaders made their offensive southwards towards Cairo in July 1221, and were thoroughly repulsed by the Muslims. The delay in waiting for Prester John was pivotal. First, it allowed the Muslims to regroup and defeat an invasion in the north from the Sultanate of Rum (in modern Turkey). Second, and most importantly, the delay allowed the change from dry season to monsoon season. Although it rains little in Egypt, the Nile flow varies greatly between seasons, burgeoning in summer contrary to European rivers, which burgeon in winter. For the Fifth Crusaders marching southwards in July 1221, this meant that previously dry crossings were now flooded. The Muslim armies exploited this fact, cornered the crusaders between two watercourses, and decimated them. Thus, Prester John was part of the aetiology for the failure of the Fifth Crusade.*

**Jacques de Vitry, *Epistola II***

*Date:* circa March, 1217[1]

Nunc autem in civitate Acconensi frequenter ad mare respicio, cum lacrimis et desiderio magno expectans adventum peregrinorum: credo enim quod, si JUL milia militum armatorum haberemus, per gratiam dei qui nobis resistere valeret non inveniremus. Est enim magna discordia inter Sarracenos et multi, pro certo errorem suum cognoscentes, si auderent et haberent auxilium christianorum, converterentur ad dominum. Credo autem quod Christiani habitantes inter Sarracenos plures sunt numero quam Sarraceni. Multi autem reges christiani habitantes in partibus Orientis usque in terram presbyteri Iohannis, audientes adventum crucesignatorum, ut eis veniant in auxilium movent guerram cum Sarracenis. Sarraceni autem, quia multas et varias habent sectas, valde inter se sunt divisi.

[…]

Quia vero in terra Sarracenorum predicare non poteram, in [con]finio terre Christianorum et Sarracenorum quando poteram predicabam et per litteras, quas eis transmittebam in sarraceno scriptas, errores eorum et legis nostre veritatem eis ostendebam. Multi autem ex Sarracenis filios suos per sacerdotes Surianorum baptizari faciebant hac sola intentione, ut diutius viverent. Inter illos autem, qui christiano nomine censentur, multos inveni qui ex defectu sane doctrine in fide nostra maxime errant, qui principaliter in quatuor partes sunt divisi. Suriani autem sicut Greci Spiritum sanctum a solo Patre procedere dicunt, Nestoriani vero in Christo duas personas asserunt, sicut in eo sunt due nature et due voluntates, unde, licet Christus sit deus, dicunt Mariam fuisse matrem Christi, non tamen dei; et tales erant omnes qui sunt in terra presbyteri Iohannis, sicut dixit michi quidam mercator cum nuper inde venerat, qui omnes de novo facti sunt Iacobite, qui dicunt unam tantum esse in Christo naturam et unam voluntatem sicut unam personam. Humana enim natura absorpta est, ut falso asserunt, a divina, sicut gutta aque, que funditur in vino, a vino absorbetur. Patriarcha vero Maronitarum cum archiepiscopis et episcopis suis et populo Maronitarum sibi subdito, relictis omnibus erroribus, obedientie sancte et catholice Romane ecclesie se subdidit et multi tam de hereticis in partibus Orientalibus commanentibus quam de Sarracenis, si sanam doctrinam audirent, facile, ut credo, ad dominum converterentur. Vos autem orate dominum, qui *nichil odit eorum que fecit* et *omnes homines vult ad agnitionem veritatis venire* [1 Timothy 2:4], ut ipse in diebus istis Orientales tenebras illuminare dignetur. Amen.

**Jacques de Vitry, Letter II**

*Date:* around March, 1217

*[Jacques de Vitry is a well-known bishop who was actively involved in crusading in the early thirteenth century, and who was Bishop of Acre in the Holy Land and so had contact with Muslims and various groups of Middle Eastern Christians both personally and through his merchant informants. He was heavily involved with the Fifth Crusade in Egypt, in which he participated, and his apparent belief in Prester John's reality probably had a major impact on world history, since it was partly responsible for the failure of the Fifth Crusade.[2] In this earlier letter addressed to various ecclesiastics, though, Jacques de Vitry said that 'Prester John Christians' were Jacobites, which may indicate that he was here equating Prester John with Ethiopia.*]

But now in the city of Acre, I often look back with tears at the sea and await the arrival of pilgrims with great longing. indeed, I believe that if we had 4,000 men of arms, through God's favour we would not be able to find anyone strong enough to resist us. indeed, there is a great discord amongst the saracens, and many of them, knowing their error for certain, if they dared to and had the help of Christians, they would be converted to the Lord. I also believe that the Christians living amongst the saracens are greater in number than the saracens [themselves]. AIso, many Christian kings living in the Eastern regions up to the land of Prester John, hearing of the arrival of the crusaders *[crucesignatorum],* would come to their help and go to war with the saracens. Also, the saracens are greatly divided amongst themselves, because they have many and various sects.

[…]

Truly, because I could not preach in the land of the saracens, when I was able to, I preached at the edge of the land of the Christians and saracens and through letters that I sent to them written in saracen, I showed them their errors and the truth of our law. And many sons of the saracens were baptised by the priests of the syrians, with the sole aim that they live longer. Also, amongst the others who are thought of as Christian in name, I found many who, from some defect, certainly erred most greatly in the doctrine of our faith; these men are principally divided into four types. The syrians, like the Greeks, say that the Holy spirit proceeds from the Father only; truly, the Nestorians assert that there are two persons in Christ, as though there were two natures and two wills in him, and for this reason, although Christ is God, they say that Mary is the mother of Christ, but not of God; and it was told to me by a certain merchant who had recently

come from there that all those who live in the land of Prester John had recently become Jacobites, who only say that there is one nature in Christ and one will as though he was one person. Indeed, the human nature was absorbed by the divine, so they falsely assert, like a drop of water which is dripped into wine is absorbed by the wine. Truly, the patriarch of the Maronites, with his archbishops and bishops, and with the Maronite people, by abandoning all their errors in obedient submission, has submitted himself to the Holy Roman Catholic Church, and I believe that many heretics residing in the eastern parts and Saracens, if they heard the sensible doctrine, would easily be converted to the Lord. You, therefore, ask the Lord 'who hates none of the things which are done',[3] and [who] 'wants all men to come to the recognition of truth',[4] that He may condescend to illuminate the eastern shades in these times.

### *Relatio de Davide (Prima Carta)*

*Date:* 1220 or very early 1221

**1.** In nomine patris et filii et spiritus sancti. Amen.

**2.** Haec est materia tocius processus regis David, filii regis Israel, filii regis Sarchisi, filii regis Iohannis, filii de Bulgaboga,[a] credentis in Christo Ihesu.

**3.** Rex David praefatus, quem Deus protegat, est minor fratrum suorum. **4.** Pater eius, rex Israel, cuius animae Deus parcat, habuit sex filios, et hic fuit minor omnium. **5.** Mortuo patre eius successit ei frater eius primogenitus, et tam ipse rex quam pater eius, rex Israel, et avi et proavi eius erant obedientes magno regi Persarum, qui vocabatur Chanchana,[b] quod dicitur in lingua nostra 'rex regum', et terra sua erat a Chassar[c] usque Bellasagum,[d] quae terra est ultra flumen, quod lingua persica dicitur flumen Geon.[e]

**6.** Praefatus autem rex Persarum convocans astrologos suos quaesivit ab eis, ut ei future praedicerent et quae ventura essent post mortem eius. **7.** Qui iuxta consuetudinem eorum ceperunt puerum unum virginem, quem minui fecerunt utroque brachio, et sanguine eius recipientes in uno vase coniuraverunt illum. **8.** Puer, antequam mortuus esset, praedixit eis omnia. Dixit quoque quendam regem David nomine, valde nobilem, debere sibi subiugare regnum Persarum. Praedictus Chanchana, rex Persarum, super hoc consuluit eos, [et] si scirent in provincia illa regem aliquem, qui vocaretur David. **9.** Qui dixerunt nullum scire, qui vocaretur hoc nomine: 'tamen rex Israel habuit filium unum parvulum, qui vocabatur David, qui nullius valoris est'. **10.** Dixit ergo rex praefatus astrologis: 'Mittamus

fratri suo, ut nobis eum mittat, et sic occidamus eum et de nomine ipso nos liberabimus'. **11.** Misit propterea nuncios suos ad regem Indiae, videlicet fratrem David, ut ei fratrem suum mitteret, quia ei volebat benefacere et honorifice promovere. **12.** Frater vero David, receptis super hoc nunciis, cum quibusdam fidelibus suis, de quibus pocius confidebat, misit fratrem suum ad regem Persarum, ignorans pravum consilium eius. **13.** Veniente autem puero ad regem Persarum, laetatus est valde rex de adventu suo. **14.** Puer autem osculatus est terram coram eo, eumque devotissime salutavit, qui valde formosus erat. Quem statim ut vidit rex, misertus est ei.

**15.** Aderant ibi duae uxores ipsius regis, quarum una erat filia regis Iohannis, amita regis Israel, patris David, altera erat filia regis Ganici,[f] ex qua filium habebat, qui vocabatur Philippus. **16.** Quae dixerunt ei: '[Neque tu times Deum!] Puer hic sub fide vestra ad vos advenit et est sub umbra vestra, et pedibus tetigit tapetum vestrum; et vultis eum pro nihilo morti tradere'. **17.** Et valde istud improperabant ei uxores eius, nam una erat Christiana, scilicet amita patris ipsius David, et altera incredula. sic rex verecundiam habuit in corde suo, et consideravit, quid de hoc facturus esset. Demum permissione divina dimisit eum repatriare. **18.** in continenti vero puer cum suis equitavit et instinctu divino per noctem et diem equitavit quadraginta leugas, tantum properans reditum suum equitaturas suas mutando. **19.** Post hoc accesserunt ad regem scribae et astrologi sui, improperantes [ei], quod male fecerat, quia ipsum redire permiserat. **20.** Rex autem in continenti poenitens de eo quod fecerat misit post eum cursores equites, ut eum apprehenderent. Quem invenire non potuerunt. **21.** Evaserat enim voluntate divina. ubicunque enim hospitabatur, gentes illius regionis confluentes ad eum, mirantes de reditu suo. Demum venit ad terram fratris sui.

**22.** Post haec spacio trium annorum mortuus est frater eius. umnes vero de regno convenientes elegerunt ipsum in regem ipsorum pro eo quod ipse videbatur formosus, discretus et magnanimus. **23.** Et, virtute divina, primo bono omine promoverunt eum in ordinem secundum consuetudinem praedecessorum suorum, deindeunxerunt eum in regem, demum copulaverunt ei in uxorem filiam regis de Machachi.[g]

**24.** Et in tantum ipse laboravit, quod gentis maximam copiam congregavit, quam utique dinumerare nemo poterat, et equitavit super terram Chanchana, videlicet regis Persarum. **25.** Cui praefatus rex Chanchana Persarum occurrit in multitudine magna et ad invicem pugnaverunt. **26.** sic voluntate divina et auxilio vivificae crucis rex David praevaluit ipsumque devicit, et maior pars gentis suae occisa fuit praeter quosdam, qui se lavachro baptismatis abluerunt. **27.** Captus est etiam dictus Chanchana, rex Persarum, et aureis

compedibus astrictus super currum ductus est captivus in terram regis david.[h]

**28a.** Praedictus autem rex david subiugavit sibi totam terram illius, quod regnum vocatur regnum regis regum Sarracenorum. In quo sunt sexaginta quatuor magnae civitates, quarum una vocatur damagalcha,[i] alia Casahar,[j] alia Lakehelech,[k] alia Melelh, alia Bissibehelech,[l] Chatem,[m] Asguchent,[n] Chaogent,[o] Bakara,[p] samarchanda, Phargana, Agagya.[q] **28b.** Inter Casar[r] usque ad Pharganas[s] sunt X dietae, a Phargana usque ad Chaogent[t] aliae X dietae, a Chaogent[u] usque Bachara[v] XX dietae, a Bachara[w] usque Zarmich[x] VIII dietae, a Zarmich[y] usque ad Bokarichi[z] X dietae, a Bokarichi[aa] usque ad Alvar[bb] X dietae, iterum a Zarmich[cc] usque ad Bellasacum[dd] X dietae.

**29.** Postmodum venit rex David ad terram, quae dicitur Alaanar,[ee] quae est in confinio Indiae. In provincia vero, ubi est praefata civitas Alaanar,[ff] sunt tot civitates, quas dinumerare nemo possit. **30.** Civitas, in qua rex Persarum morari consueverat, Gasne[gg] vocatur, quae maxima civitas est et populosa valde, in qua sunt quingentae machomeriae et totidem scolae et sexcenti fundeci, ubi hospitari consueverant sophi Sarracenorum, qui dicuntur in lingua nostra monachi. **31.** Praefatus rex David pugnavit postmodum cum rege praedictae terrae, quae dicitur Alaanar,[hh] et devicit eum et tota fere gens eius occisa est praeter quandam partem, quae conversa est ad fidem nostram.

**32.** Et subiugata sibi tota terra illa reversus est ad terram, quae dicitur Chata.[ii] Tunc erant treugae inter regem Chata[jj] et Chavarsmisan,[kk] et erant inter eos terrae pro indiviso, scilicet Bachara et Sarmachant et Bellaseth.[ll] **33.** Praefatus Chavarsmisan misit nuncios suos ad regem David concordavit cum eo, deditque ei totam terram, quam habebat ultra flumen Geon.[mm] **34.** Postquam enim ipse fuit securus de rege David, congregavit gentem maximam et ivit super quandam provinciam, quae vocatur Chorasan,[nn] et super magnum Arach et parvum Arach, quae sunt magnae provinciae, et Diarbechen,[oo] et venit prope Baldach per sex dietas.

**35.** Qui misit nuncios suos ad chalipham de Baldach, qui dominatus fuerat in Baldach per annos XLI, qui vocatur Allnanzer[pp] Ledinalla,[qq] quod est interpretatum ‘auxilium divinae legis’; istud est cognomentum eius, nomen eius vocatur Romanzur,[rr] filius Mostadi;[ss] unde et diffidavit eum. Caliphas vero magno timore ductus, quia vires habere non poterat, ut resisteret ei, consuluit super hoc fideles suos. **36.** Qui dixerunt ei, ut rogaret Iaphelit,[tt] patriarcham Nestorinorum,[uu] qui in civitate Baldach morabatur, quod mitteret regi David, ut treugas frangeret Chavarsmisan, et sic cessaret ab infestacione sua. **37.** Praefatus ergo chaliphas nocte equitavit cum quibusdam de suis, quia

die equitare non consuevit nisi statutis diebus, et ivit ad domum patriarchae, qui morabatur intus in Baldach, quem statim ut vidit patriarcha, honorifice suscepit eum et laetatus est valde de adventu suo. Tunc allocutus est eum caliphas dicens ei: 'In maximo articulo peto auxilium tuum, et fidus amicus in necessitate probatur. **38.** Ecce, nequam iste Chavarsmisan super nos potenter advenit, et si occupaverit terram istam, omnes Christianos tuos morti tradet, quia eos valde odio habet'. **39**.De quo respondit sibi patriarcha verum fore. Tandem dixit ei caliphas, quod 'hoc modo me iuvare potestis. Rex David et omnes alii, qui custodiunt legem vestram, obediunt vobis. Rogo ergo vos, ut per literas et nuncios vestros regi David praecipiendo mittatis, ut guerram moveat contra Chavarsmisan, et sic cessabit a molestacione nostra. scio enim pro certo, quod, si rex David ipsum molestare coeperit, in continenti ipse repatriabit. Nam si hoc mihi compleveritis, vobis et omnibus, qui tenent legem vestram, quicquid volueritis, concedemus'. **40.** Respondit ei patriarcha: 'Vos scitis, quia sacramento tenemur omnibus praedecessoribus vestris et vobis, ut nullas litteras mittamus alicui regi Christianorum, nec aliqua nova [ei] significemus de terra vestra'. **41.** Ad quod sibi respondit caliphas: 'Ego dominus sum huius terrae et caliphas prophetarum Sarracenorum. super hoc licenciam tibi concedo et litteras securitatis tibi inde faciam'. **42.** Sic patriarcha exaudiens preces caliphae, misit regi David, ut dicto Chavarsmisan treugas infringeret. Quo audito rex David congregavit gentem innumerabilem et equitavit super terram Chavarsmisan. **43.** Audiens autem istud Chavasmisan ad propria rediit. De quo laetatus valde caliphas est, offerens maximam quantitatem auri ipsi patriarchae.

**44.** Quam patriarcha omnino recipere recusavit: unum tantum rogavit, ut faceret ei dirui quandam machomeriam, quae erat super ecclesiam patriarchae, quae sibi magnam inferebat molestiam. Quam praefatus caliphas sic funditus subvertere fecit in nocte, quod in die etiam signum illius non comparuit, et istud fuit primum malum omen legis sarracenae. **45.** Praeterea postquam Chavarsmisan ad terram suam rediit, voluit libenter pacisci cum rege David, quod ille penitus recusavit. Et sic congregavit gentem innumeram Chavarsmisan et transivit flumen Geon,[vv] praeparans se regi David potenter oppositurum. **46.** Quem rex David viriliter divicit in campo, et maior pars gentis suae occisa fuit. Asserunt eum quidam fuisse mortuum, quidam vero dubitant, ubi sit.

**47.** iterato congregavit gentem maximam rex David et secum alios sedecim magnos viros, quorum unus habebat centum[ww] millia hominum, alius ducenta[xx] millia vel parum plus vel parum minus, et divisit exercitum suum in quadraginta crucibus, quarum quaelibet continebat sub se C[yy] millia hominum, et venit citra flumen Geon[zz] et

cepit. **48.** Choarismen[a] et Moe et Bendei,[b] Techris,[c] Nanru,[d] sarches, Thus,[e] Tarsis,[f] Dargan, Chorasan,[g] Nichagyar,[h] Termode,[i] Baguarda,[j] Nassa,[k] Bastem,[l] edabamagam,[m] Bolche,[n] Ceregi,[o] segisten,[p] saarsitan,[q] Messedali,[r] Chechi, Mean,[s] seheri,[t] quae omnes sunt magnae civitates, praeter alia castra parva et villas, quae fuerunt CC, **49.** et regnum soldani soniar,[u] in quo sunt hae civitates: Musahar,[v] Selbikan,[w] Deschaan,[x] Curchaan[y] et alia provincia, quae dicitur Dalgor,[z] in qua sunt VIII magnae civitates, et regnum de Mazendran,[aa] in quo sunt VIII civitates magnae et CC castra; et terra ista in longitudine est XX dierum et in latitudine XII. Et hic est finis terrarum Cavasmisan.[bb]

**50.** Regnum soldani Tagiel[cc] est in introitu regni Persarum, quod dicitur 'magnum Arach', id est 'magnum regnum', quod per tres menses vix potest equitari. **51.** Et caput huius regni est quaedam civitas, quae vocatur Ray.[dd] Aliae civitates vocantur Auher,[ee] Schariac,[ff] Schemeneth,[gg] Schemanan,[hh] Causvin,[ii] Senchan,[jj] Cham,[kk] Amedan, Esbohan,[ll] Sanguhaa,[mm] Senchehan,[nn] Conine,[oo] Amiana[pp] et castra plus quam CCC. **52.** In terra de Diarbakan[qq] sunt hae civitates: Mirris,[rr] Eiohan,[ss] Bellochan,[tt] Cohai,[uu] Change,[vv] Eschenii,[ww] Aramre,[xx] Enuschaar, Menaga, Sada, Chanogun, Tectemodi, Sardahan, Gyardun, Munedo, Solemeste; et terra ista est XLVII dierum in longitudine. Item in provincia, quae dicitur Chanka,[yy] sunt XX civitates et castra CXX,[zz] et regnum istud vocatur regnum soldani Ebebeth,[a] quod dicitur 'parvum Arach', id est 'parvum regnum'. Omnes praefatas terras istas subiugavit sibi rex David et distat a Baldach per quinque dietas et a Muscbech[b] per totidem dietas, **53.** et caput exercitus David pervenerat in terram Georgianorum, quos devicit et abstulit eis XL castra, quia non sunt vere credentes.

**54.** Post haec rex David, qui semper triumphet et vivat, misit nuncios [suos] ad calipham de Baldach, qui tulerunt super caput suum vexillum, in quo erat crux, quando intraverunt Baldach. **55.** Quibus dixerunt Sarraceni: 'Quare fertis super caput vestrum crucem, cum sitis in Baldach (quae dicitur sarracenice 'Darheselem',[c] quod est interpretatum 'curia salutis') et in facie Sarracenorum?' **56.** Quibus dixerunt nuncii: 'Dominus noster, rex David, praecepit nobis, ut hoc modo intremus terram, aliter vero non. Quodsi nolueritis, revertemur'. **57.** Significatum est hoc caliphae, qui dixit, ut intrent sicut velint. Quos statim ut caliphas vidit, honorifice suscepit, assurgens eis, quos iuxta se sedere fecit. **58.** Cui nuncii ex parte domini sui per interpretem locuti sunt dicentes: 'Rex noster David vos salutat et significat, quod noster Iaphelet,[d] id est patriarcha, multum se commendat de vobis, quod sincerum semper habuistis animum erga Christianos et honorastis ecclesias nostras, pro quo ipse concedit vobis sextam partem terrae, quam tenetis, et vult habere Baldach, ut sit ibi

sedes patriarchae nostri'. **59.** Quibus dixit caliphas: 'Rex virtute divina subiugavit sibi tantam terram et ubique personaliter esse non potest. Oportet ut per terras conquisitas statuat baiulos suos; supplico ergo, ut me in terra ista baiulum suum statuat, et dabo sibi tantum pecuniae, quantum ipse voluerit'. **60.** Nuncii dixerunt: 'Non venimus ad quaerendam pecuniam; sed, quia audivimus vos dirui fecisse sanctam civitatem ierusalem, tantum pecuniae nobiscum ferimus, quod muros ipsius auro et argento reaedificabimus'. **61.** Obtulit etiam nunciis exennia valentia centum millia besanciorum, quae nuncii recipere noluerunt.

**62.** Contigit interea, quod Melvcaleem[e] soldanus Babiloniae, miserat in exennium calypho quosdam milites Christianos, quos liberavit ad preces nunciorum. **63.** Quorum quidam ex eis Antiochiam venerunt, qui haec et alios rumores dixerunt, quod, quando rex David pervenit ad terram, quae dicitur Casvin,[f] quam sibi subiugavit, dimisit ibi baiulum suum cum paucis de suis, et dimittens ipsam terram post tergum suum, homines illius civitatis interfecerunt baiulum regis et alios de familia sua. **64.** Quod veniens ad notitiam regis, misit partem gentis suae ad obsidendam terram illam. Quae obsessa fuit per sex dies. **65.** septimo vero die in medio noctis ceciderunt tres turres et tres telae de muris praedictae civitatis, et ingredientes Christiani terram ipsam occiderunt in ea octoginta millia hominum pugnatorum.

**66.** Pro quo omnes credentes in Christo iesu monemus, ut orent Dominum, ut regi David triumphus conservetur et salus, qui obediens est Deo et sanctae ecclesiae, qui liberat credentes de manibus incredulorum, qui est rex regum, qui destruit legem sarracenorum, qui tuetur sanctam ecclesiam, qui est rex Orientis.

### *Relatio de Davide (First Version)*

*Date:* 1220 or very early 1221

*[This confused text is a Latin translation of what is thought to be a tract originally written in Arabic by a Christian in Baghdad in 1220–21, but some of the material here was certainly added by its Latin translators. It describes in essence the conquests of Chingis Khan, but instead he is presented as a Christian king named David, great grandson of Prester John, a figure who becomes from this point on a regular feature of the Prester John legend. A copy of this text and its second version, which were circulating widely in 1220–21, made their way to Jacques de Vitry in Egypt on the Fifth Crusade, and although the text does display some intimate knowledge of the initial movements of the Mongols, the details became so distorted by the time they reached the crusaders that those*

*initial facts became grossly misunderstood. Many place names occur in the text. I have preserved their original forms as in Zarncke's edition, and then given my interpretations in parentheses; where they require close discussion, a footnote is given.]*

In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

This is a description of the complete advance of King David, the son of King Israel,[5] the son of King Sarkis, the son of King John, the son of Bulgaboga,[6] a believer in Jesus Christ.

The aforementioned King David (may God protect him!) whom God protects, is the youngest of his brothers. His father, King Israel (may God spare his soul!), had six sons, and he was the youngest of them all. With the death of his father, his first-born brother succeeded him, and this king, just like his father, King Israel, and his grandfathers and great-grandfathers, was subject to the great King of the Persians, who was called Chanchana, which means in our language 'king of kings',[7] and his land was from Chassar [Kashgar][8] up to Bellasagum [Balasagun], which is beyond the river which is called, in the Persian language, the river Geon.[9]

The aforementioned King of the Persians called together his astrologers and asked them to predict the future and [tell] him what was going to happen after his death. As is their custom, they took a virgin boy, and, having cut off both his arms, they collected his blood in a vase and implored him [to foretell the future]. The boy, before he had died, foretold everything to them. indeed, he said that a certain king, David by name, a very noble man, would make the kingdom of the Persians his subject. The aforesaid Chanchana, King of the Persians, questioned them about this, if they knew of any such king in those provinces who was called David. They said they knew of no one who was called by such a name: 'however King Israel had a very small son who is called David, who is of no importance'. Then the aforementioned king said to the astrologers: 'Let us send word to his brother, so that he may send him to us, and in this way let us kill him and we will free ourselves from his name'. For this reason he sent his messengers to David's brother, the King of India, that he should send him his brother, because he wished to do service to him and honourably advance him. Truly, when David's brother heard mention of this, along with certain of his devotees in whom he had great confidence, he sent his brother to the King of the Persians, unaware of his vicious plan. And while the boy was coming to the King of the Persians, the king greatly rejoiced at his arrival. The boy kissed the ground before him and saluted him most devotedly. The boy was very beautiful, and when the king saw him, he immediately felt pity for him.

The two wives of that king were present there, one of whom was

the daughter of King John, the paternal aunt of David's father King Israel, the other was the daughter of King Ganici, from whom he had a son who was called Philip. 'Do you not fear God?!' they asked him. 'This boy came to you under your faith and is under your protection, and he touches your carpet with his feet; and you want him to be handed over to death for nothing?!' And his wives greatly reproached him for this, for one was a Christian woman, namely the paternal aunt of that father of David, and the other was an unbeliever. So the king felt shame in his heart and considered what he should do. Finally, with divine permission, he allowed him to return to his native land. Without delay, the boy rode off with his men and, with God stirring him on, he rode for fourty leagues by night and day, speeding up his return by changing his horses [often]. After this the king's scribes and astrologers came to him and reproached him that he did wrongly, because he allowed [the boy] to return. Then the king was immediately sorry for what he had done, [so] he sent horsemen after him to apprehend him, but they didn't find him, for indeed, he had escaped by divine will. And at length he came to his brother's land.

Three years later, his brother died. Truly, everyone from the kingdom, gathering before him, elected him [the boy] to be their king, because he seemed handsome, distinguished, and bold. And, with divine strength, at the first good omen, they promoted him to his rank following the custom of his predecessors, then they anointed him as king; finally they bound to him as wife the daughter of the king of Damachag.[10]

And he made such a great effort that he brought together a greatest abundance of people, which certainly no one can count, and he rode through the land of Chanchana, the King of the Persians. The aforementioned Chanchana, King of the Persians, came to oppose him with a great multitude and they fought each other. Then, by divine will and with the help of the life-giving cross, King David prevailed and subdued him, and the greater part of his people was killed except those who cleansed themselves with the bath of baptism. indeed, the aforesaid Chanchana, King of the Persians, was captured, bound with golden shackles and led captive on a chariot to the land of King David.

But the aforesaid King David subdued to himself that man's entire land, which is called the kingdom of the King of Kings of the saracens. In this [land] there are 64 great cities, of which one is called Damagalcha [?], another Casahar [Kashgar], another Lakehelech [Qayaligh], another Melelh [Almaligh?], others are Bissibehelech [Beshbalik], Chatem [Khotan?], Asguchent [Ozgend], Chaogent [Khojend], Bakara [Bukhara], samarchanda [samarkand], Phargana [Fergana], Agagya [Marginan?]. From Casar to Phargana is a journey of 10 days; from Phargana to Chaogent is another 10 days; from

Chaogent to Bachara is 20 days; from Bachara to Zarmich [Zarnuq] is eight days; from Zarmich to Bokarichi [Berkouch] is 10 days; from Bokarichi to Alvar [?] is 10 days; again from Zarmich to Bellasacum [Balasagun] is 10 days.

Afterwards, King David came to the land called Alaanar,[11] which is at the border of india. Truly, in the province where the aforesaid city of Alaanar lies, there are so many cities that no one can count them. The city in which the King of the Persians had been accustomed to stay is called Gasne [Ghazni], which is a very large and populous city, in which there are 500 mosques and as many schools, and 600 inns, where the wise men *(sufi)* of the saracens were accustomed to lodge, which are called in our language 'monks'. The aforementioned King David afterwards fought with the king of the aforesaid land which is called Alaanar, and he subdued him and almost that entire people of his was killed, except that part which was converted to our faith.

And, having subjugated to himself that whole land, he returned to the land called Chata [Cathay/Khitai].[12] At that time, there was a truce between the King of Chata and the Chavarsmisan [the Khwarazm-shah], and the lands between them were undivided, namely Bachara and Sarmachant and Bellaseth [Ballasaghun?]. The aforementioned Chavarsmisan sent his messengers to King David, made peace with him and gave him all the land he held beyond the River Geon. After he was safe from King David, he brought together the greatest people and went over a certain province called Chorasan [Khorasan], and over Great Arach and Small Arach,[13] which are great provinces, and Diarbechen [Diyarbakir], and he came to within six days' journey of Baghdad.

He sent his messengers to the Caliph of Baghdad, who had ruled over Baghdad for 41 years, who is called Allnanzer Ledinalla, which translates as 'the help of divine law'; this is his surname, his name is called Romanzur, the son of Mostadi;[14] and he distrusted him. Truly, the Caliph, led by great terror, because he was not able to have the strength to resist him, consulted his followers about this. They told him to ask Iaphelit, the patriarch of the Nestorians,[15] who was staying in the city of Baghdad, to break the truce with the Chavarsmisam, and thus he might cease from his harassment. Therefore, the aforementioned Caliph rode by night with some of his men, because he was not accustomed to ride by day except on prearranged days, and he went to the house of the patriarch, who lived in Baghdad. When the patriarch saw him, he immediately received him honourably and greatly rejoiced at his arrival. Then the caliph spoke to him, saying: 'I ask your help at this greatest moment, and the faithful friend is asked out of necessity. Behold, that wicked Chavarsmisan came upon us powerfully, and if he occupies this land,

all of your Christians will be put to death, because he has great hatred for them'. The patriarch replied that this would be the case. At length, the caliph said to him: 'You can help me in this way. King David and all the others who observe your law are obedient to you. I therefore ask you to send your letters and messengers to King David to instruct him to make war against the Chavarsmisan, and thus he will free us from his threats. indeed, I know for certain that if King David began to threaten him, that man would return to his native land without delay. Now if you do this for me, we will concede whatever you want for yourself and for all those who hold your law'. The patriarch replied to him: 'You know that we are bound by oath to all your predecessors and to yourself not to send any letter to any Christian king, nor to give them any information about your land'. To this the caliph responded: 'i am the lord of this land and the Caliph of the prophets of the saracens. I grant you license to do this, and will therefore issue you a letter of immunity regarding this'. Thus the patriarch, heeding the prayers of the Caliph, sent [instructions] to King David to break the truce with the said Chavarsmisan. Having heard this, King David brought together an innumerable people and rode over the land of the Chavarsmisan. Hearing this, the Chavarsmisan returned to his own lands. The Caliph rejoiced greatly from this, offering the greatest quantity of gold to the patriarch. The patriarch rejected this completely [but] asked for one thing: that he might demolish for him a certain mosque that was above the patriarch's church, which caused him great insult. The Caliph therefore had it completely destroyed by night, so that by day there was no sign of it, and this was the first evil omen of the saracen law. In addition, after the Chavarsmisan returned to his land, he gladly wished to enter into an agreement with King David, but he utterly refused. And so the Chavarsmisan brought together an innumerable people, crossed the River Geon, and prepared himself to powerfully oppose King David. King David strongly defeated him on the field [of battle], and the greater part of his people was killed. Certain people allege that he perished, others are uncertain where he may be.[16]

King David, having for a second time brought together a greatest people and another 16 great men, one of which had 100,000 men, another of which had 200,000 or a little more or a little less, and he divided his army into fourty crosses, each of which had beneath it 100,000 men, and he came before the River Geon and seized Choarismen [Khwārazmia] and Moa and Bendei [?], Techris [?], Nanru [Merv?], Sarches [Sarakhs], Thus [Tūs], Tarsis [Turshiz], Dargan [Damgan], Chorasan [Khurasan], Nichagyar [Nishapur], Termode [Termez], Baguarda [Abivard], Nassa [Nisā], Bastem [Basṭām], Edabamagam [Dāmghān?], Bolche [Balkh], Ceregi [Kerki],

Segisten [Sijistān], Saarsitan [Shahr-i Sistān], Messedali [Mashhad-i ʻAlī], Chechi [?], Mean [Meana], [and] Seheri [Sari], all of which are great cities, [and] not including the other small castles and villages which were 200 [in number] and the kingdom of Sultan Soniar[17] in which there are these cities: Musahar [Misurgan], Selbikan [Dolbiqan], Deschaan [Dehistan], Curchaan [Gurgān], and another province which is called Dalgor [Ghūr], in which there are eight great cities, and the kingdom of Mazendran [Māzandarān], in which there are eight great cities and 200 castles; and this land is twenty days' journey in length and twelve in width. And this is the end of the lands of the Cavasmisan.

The kingdom of Sultan Toghrul[18] is at the entrance to the kingdom of the Persians, which is called Great Arach, that is, 'Great Kingdom', which can scarcely be ridden across in three months. And the head of this kingdom is a certain city called Ray. Other cities are called Auher [Abhār], Schariac [Shahr-e-Ray?], Schemeneth [Sawamak?], Schemanan [Simnān], Causvin [Qazwīn], Senchan [Zanjān], Cham [Qom], Amedan [Hamadān], Esbohan [Isfahān], Sanguhaa [Saghaniyan], Senchehan [Zanjan?], Conine [Kanein], Amiana [?], and [there are] more than 300 castles. In the land of Diarbakan [Azerbaijan] there are these cities: Mirris [Mires], Eiohan [Awjan], Bellochan [Beylagan], Cohai [Khoy], Change [Ganja], Eschenii [Samakhi?], Aramre [Urmiyā?], Enuschaar [Noshin Shahr? Ushnuh?], Menaga [Marāgha?], Sada [?], Chanogun [Khonej?], Tectemodi [?], Sardahan [Sardahan], Gyardun [Warthan?], Munedo [?], Solemeste [Salmās][19]; and that land is 47 days' journey in length. Likewise, in the province called Chanka [Kermānshāh?], there are twenty cities and 120 castles, and that kingdom is called the kingdom of the Sultan of Ebebeth, which is called Small Arach, that is, 'small kingdom'. King David made all these aforementioned lands his subjects and he was five days' journey away from Baghdad, and the same distance from Muscbech [Mosul?], and the head of David's army arrived at the land of the Georgians, whom he defeated and from whom he took fourty castles, because although they were Christians, they had allied with the Saracens.

After this, King David, who, may he always triumph and live, sent to the Caliph of Baghdad his messengers, who, when they entered Baghdad, carried a banner over their heads on which was a cross. The Saracens said to them: 'Why do you carry a cross over your head when you are in Baghdad (which is called 'Darheselem' in Saracen, which is translated as 'court of salvation')[20] and in the presence of Saracens?' The messengers replied: 'Our lord, King David, ordered us to enter the land in this way or not at all. But if you will not allow it, we will turn back'. This was told to the Caliph, who said that they could enter as

they wished. When the Caliph saw them, he immediately received them honourably, rising up [to greet] them, and having them sit next to him. The messengers spoke to him through an interpreter on behalf of their lord, saying: 'Our king, David, greets you and informs you that our iaphelet, that is, the Patriarch, greatly commends you to him, because you always had a sincere heart towards Christians, and honoured our churches, and for this reason he is conceding to you one sixth part of the land you hold, and he wants to have Baghdad so that the seat of our patriarch might be there'. The Caliph said to them: 'The king, by divine strength, has subdued to himself so much territory, and he cannot be everywhere in person. He must set up his stewards throughout the conquered lands. I therefore ask humbly that he make me his steward in this land, and I will give to him as much money as he wants'. The messengers said: 'We do not come to obtain money; rather, because we have heard that you ordered the holy city of Jerusalem to be demolished, we are taking enough money with us to rebuild the walls of that city with gold and silver'. in addition to this, he offered the messengers gifts to the value of 100,000 bezants, which the messengers refused to accept.

Meanwhile, it happened that Melvcaleem, the sultan of Babylon,[21] had sent to the Caliph as a gift certain Christian knights which he had freed at the prayers of the messengers. some of these came from them to Antioch, who told these and other rumours, that, when King David arrived at the land which is called Casvin [Qasvln], which he made his subject, he dismissed his steward there with a few of his men, and turning his back on that land, a man of that city killed the king's steward and some of his family members. When this came to the king's attention, he sent part of his people to lay siege to that land. It was besieged for six days. On the seventh day, in the middle of the night, three of the aforesaid city's towers fell and six cubits [of bricks] from the walls, and the Christians entered that land and killed 80,000 fighting men.

On account of this, we remind all those who believe in Jesus Christ to beseech God in order that triumph and health be preserved for King David, who is obedient to God and the holy church, who liberates believers from the hands of unbelievers, who is king of kings, who destroys the law of the saracens, who protects the holy church, [and] who is the king of the Orient.

**Relatio de Davide (Secunda Carta)**

*Date:* 1220 or very early 1221

**1.** Subiugavit Dominus famulo suo, regi David, terram Caracher,[a] in qua sunt XII civitates magnae, et praeterea terram soldani Betrich,[b] in qua sunt VIII magnae civitates. Praeterea terram, quae dicitur Sacchero[c] usque Sagibus,[d] XX[e] dietas, et inde usque Pharaga et Margana,[f] X dietas. Inde subiugavit sibi terram Coegent,[g] unde venit copia optimi serici, quae durat usque Bocara,[h] quae continet intra se CCC [civitates] et LXVI[i] flumina, et iudices seu[j] consules XII millia, et continet XX dietas, et inde usque ad terram Harsinoth[k] VIII dietas, et inde usque ad Sacchere[l] XX dietas. Ista sunt ultra flumen Geos et in medio istarum terrarum sunt CCL[m] oppida et villae magnae.

**2.** Citra flumen Geos cepit dominium soldani Machemoth,[n] cuius terra dicitur Coresen,[o] in qua sunt hae civitates: Amanchioniro,[p] Mero, Sirchos,[q] Thos,[r] Maummerie,[s] Dadli,[t] Sarasten,[u] Gaharamien,[v] Nossachor,[w] unde veniunt optimi baudekini, Barach, Herre,[x] unde veniunt lapides preciosi, Bastem,[y] Schere,[z] Damirigagi;[aa] istae sunt maiores civitates. De aliis oppidis et villis magnis CCXXX[bb] sibi subiugavit. **3.** Acquisivit praeterea terram soldani Senetha,[cc] quae continet has civitates magnas: Nessihor,[dd] Debihagan,[ee] Dehestan,[ff] Gargan.[gg] Et praeterea cepit regionem Decantan-de-hensin,[hh] quae continet VIII civitates magnas. **4.** Praeterea cepit regiones Maherentzedran[ii] et terram adiacentem cum X civitatibus magnis et CCL munitionibus magnis.

**5.** Inde cepit regiones soldani magni, qui potentior est omnibus praedictis, Caioreseth,[jj] continentes III[kk] menses in longitudine et totidem in latitudine.

**6.** Inde cepit terram soldani Teor in Delharach[ll] Inde venit prope Baldach et cepit a latere terram Debihagan,[mm] continentem XLVII magnas civitates et famosas, inter quas maiores sunt Leray,[nn] Aschar,[oo] Casuhil,[pp] Chon,[qq] Chassehen,[rr] Sephen, unde veniunt optimi bocaramni,[ss] Hamedam,[tt] et praeter praedictas XLVII civitates continet oppida et villas magnas CCCCXX.[uu] **7.** Postea cepit terram soldani sardahan,[vv] continentem has civitates: Harmam[ww] et Marahan,[xx] selemesth,[yy] Marahage,[zz] unde venit terra, qua capita abluuntur. Praeterea cepit terram amiralis Bobair,[a] continentem Xi civitates, cuius metropolis est Keme,[b] et CLXX[c] oppida et villas magnas.[d] Et haec est ultima regio Persidis ex parte nostra, et inde non est nisi plana terra usque Baldach, scilicet V[e] dietae. **8.** Omnia praedicta nomina sunt in persica lingua.

### *Relatio de Davide (Second Version)*

*Date:* 1220 or very early 1221

*[This is another of the texts circulating in 1220–21 that describes the advent of Chingis Khan. This text, like the previous, made its way to Jacques de Vitry in Egypt.]*

The Lord made subject to His servant, King David, the land of Caracher [Qarashahr], in which there are twelve great cities, and in addition the land of sultan Betrich,[22] in which there are eight great cities, in addition to the land which is called sacchero, up to sagibus, twenty days' journey, and from there up to Pharaga [Ferghana] and Margana [Marginan], ten days' journey. From there he subjugated the land of Coegent [Khojend], whence the finest silks come, and which extends up to Bocara [Bukhara], containing within it 300 [cities?] and 64 rivers, and 12,000 jurors or magistrates, and being twenty days' journey wide, and from there to the land of Harsinoth is a journey of eight days, and from there to sacchere is a journey of 20 days. These are beyond the River Geos[23] and in the middle of these lands there are 250 towns and great villages.

On this side of the River Geos, he captured the domain of sultan Muhammad, whose land is called Coresen [Khwarazm], in which there are these cities: Amanchioniro [Amul?], Mero [Merv], Sirchos [Sarakhs], Thos [Tus], Maummerie Dadli [Messhed],[24] sarasten [sharistan], Gaharamien [?], Nossachor [Nishapūr], where the best baldachins come from, Barach [Balkh], Herre [Herāt], where precious stones come from, Bastem [Bistām], Schere [Sari], Damirigagi [Damarki]; these are the greater cities. From the other towns and great villages, he made 230 subject to himself. In addition, he acquired the land of sultan senetha, which contains these great cities: Nessihor [Nīshāpūr? Misurgan?], Debihagan [Dāmghān? Dolbiqan], Dehestan [Dehistan], [and] Gargan [Gorgan]. And in addition he captured the region of Decantan-de-hensin [?], which contains eight great cities. In addition, he captured the regions of Maherentzedran [Māzandarān] and the adjacent land along with ten great cities and 250 great fortresses.

From there, he captured the regions of the great sultan, who is more powerful than all the aforesaid people, [namely] Caioreseth [Kai-Khosrau],[25] extending for three months in length and the same in width. From there, he captured the land of Sultan Teor Delharach [Toghrul de l'Iraq]. From there, he came near Baghdad and captured the land of Debihagan [Azerbaijan] from the side, which contains 47 great and famous cities, amongst which the greater are Leray [Rayy], Achar [Abhar], Casuhil [Qazvin], Chon [Qum], Chassehen [Kashan], Sephen [Isfahan], where the best buckrams[26] come from, Hamedam [Hamadan], and in addition to the aforesaid 47 cities, it contains 420 towns and great villages. Afterwards, he captured the land of Sultan

Sardahan [Sardjahan], which contains these cities: Harmam [Urmiyah?] and Marahan [Marand], Selemesth [Selmas], Marahage [Maragha], whence comes the earth with which heads are cleansed [?].[27] In addition, he captured the land of the Emir Bobair [Abu-Bakr], which contains eleven cities, whose capital is Keme [Qayen], and 170 towns and great villages. And this is the furthest region of Persia from our area, and from there there is nothing but a five-day journey of flat land all the way to Baghdad.

All the aforesaid names are in the Persian tongue.

## W. and R., Epistola / *Relatio de Davide (Tertia Carta)*

*Date:* 1220 or very early 1221

**1a)** Dilectissimis dominis et amicis suis, E. decano et H. scolastico ecclesie Monasteriensis, devoti sui W. et R. sue possibilitatis obsequium. Significamus dilectioni vestre, quod apud urbem Damiatam sani et incolumes rebus et corporibus, de quo vobis congaudere non dubitamus, consistimus. Preterea vestram latere nolumus discretionem, quod secundum veros rumores quidam rex, David nomine, Jerosolimam in subsidium christianorum de sua properat regione, et quantam terram devicerit, inferius pro parte invenietis. In principio igitur rex David cepit terram Adiaquo et sunt .XII. civitates; et cepit post hec terram Berit et sunt .VIII. civitates.

**1b)** Rex Indie David christianissimus presbiter iohannes cognominatus veniens in manu forti contra sarracenos expugnando eos terras eorum occupavit. Mediante dei auxilio sicut inferuit (?) continetur. In principio autem cepit rex David terram adi aquo et sunt XII civitates et post cepit terram Beeric et sunt octo civitates.

**1c)** Rex David filius Iohannis presbiteri de India pro nomine domini nostri Iesu Christi exit a terra sua cum magno exercitu ad succursum terrae sanctae. Cepit a principio Sidira, ibi sunt XII civitates; et inde progressus cepit terram Beruth, in qua sunt VIII civitates.

Cepit postea[a] terram Sago,[b] et de terra Sago[c] usque Quassay, et[d] sunt .XXX. diete.[e] Et de Quassay[f] usque Sarahanna[g] .X. diete, et de Quassay[h] usque Bochara .XXI.[i] diete; et[j] de Bochara[k] usque Helcarnoth[l] .VIII. diete, et[m] de Helcarnoth[n] usque Beleto[o] .XXI.[p] diete. Et sunt tam[q] in dominatione terre quam in civitatibus supradictis parve ville et castella plusquam .CC.XX. **2.** Et transivit[r] Gyon,[s] et cepit regionem[t] regis Mehemoth,[u] scilicet terram Corasanam,[v] et sunt

civitates[w] magne Amo et Benda[x] et Neyroth[y] et[z] Marue[aa] et Sarachis[bb] et Toys[cc] et Mesarabalchi[dd] et Sarastam[ee] et Carbame[ff] et Nessarua[gg] et Balo[hh] et Ochore[ii] et Balsatayn[jj] et Clery[kk] et Demohag[ll] et Serastam[mm] et de[nn] parvis civitatibus et castris .CC.XXII.[oo] **3.** Et venit[pp] ad terram Sennyar[qq] et cepit eam, et sunt civitates[rr] magne: Nelhyr[ss] et[tt] Chaldecham[uu] et Destuata[vv] et Carcam.[ww] Et cepit angulum de Chore,[xx] et civitates sunt .VIII. et magne.[yy] **4.** Et cepit Mercardaram[zz] et totam dominationem ipsius, et sunt[a] .X. civitates magne[b] et .CC.V castella. **5.** Et venit ad regionem Thauramesach,[c] cuius dominium durat per tres menses in longum, et tres in latum,[d] et cepit totam **6. E**t venit ad regionem regis Thoyl,[e] et hec est Echalath[f] magnum,[g] et sunt civitates[h] magne: Ray[i] et[j] Hesbar[k] et[l] Raytam[m] et[n] Termiz[o] et Comp[p] et[q] Cassam et[r] Nassaytar[s] et[t] spachamem[u] et Amadam,[v] et de civitatibus parvis[w] et castris .CCCC. XXi.[x] **7.** Et venit ad regionem[y] Darbegani[z] et sunt .XL. et .iX. civitates magne,[aa] Mechana[bb] et[cc] Channa[dd] et Baruaria[ee] et Nardevi[ff] et Beleygam[gg] et Choney[hh] et Cardahahin[ii] et Armina[jj] et Narad[kk] et salamas et Mayrayca[ll] et erno.[mm] et venit Quoyam,[nn] et cepit eam, et dominationem Hemyr et[oo] Roboyr,[pp] et sunt .Xi. magne civitates et .C.LXX. parve[qq] ville et castra. **8.** Et rex David habet secum[rr] .CC. LV. milia,[ss] qui non sunt de lege sua,[tt] et[uu] .C.XXXii.[vv] milia militum de lege sua[ww] probatissimorum.[xx] et deferunt[yy] ante se .XL. cruces pro vexillis, et post unamquamlibet[zz] crucem .C. milia equites.[a] Et cepit[b] duo regna Persarum maxima, et debellavit Jorgianos,[c] quia fecerunt treugas[d] cum Sarracenis, et multis interfectis eos ipsi subiugavit,[e] et iam erat[f] prope Baldach, quando hee littere sunt facte;[g] et durat terra quam cepit .C.LI. dietis.[h]

## W. and R., Letter / *Relatio de Davide (Third Version)*

*Date:* 1220 or very early 1221

*[This text is a letter written by two unidentified clergymen, whose names are abbreviated to W. and R. in manuscript copies. In Egypt on the Fifth Crusade, they were privy to one of the* Relatio de Davide *texts, then communicated the story of King David to their fellow ecclesiastics in Munster, Germany. It is therefore emblematic of the excitement that news of Chingis Khan brought to the crusaders in Egypt. The various manuscripts give three variant introductions, which are preserved here as a), b) and c).]*

**a)** From W. and R., your devotees, to our most beloved lords and friends, E. the deacon and H. the scholar of the church of Münster, complying with your request. We are communicating to your pleasure

that we are staying at the city of Damietta safe and sound in bodies and spirits; we do not doubt that this is joyous news for you. In addition, we do not wish your discretion to remain in the dark, that according to true rumours a certain king, David by name, is hastening from his own land to the aid of the Christians at Jerusalem, and that he has subdued so much territory, only some of which you will find described below. So in the beginning, Kind David captured the land of Adiaquo [?] and there are twelve cities there, and after this he captured the land of Berit [?] and there are eight cities there.

**b)** David, the most Christian King of India, known as Prester John, coming with a mighty force against the Saracens, has destroyed them and occupied their lands. He did this by means of God's help, just as Hell is contained. In the beginning, King David captured the land of Adi Aquo [?], and there are 12 cities there, and afterwards he captured the land of Beeric [?], and there are eight cities there.

**c)** King David, the son of Prester John of India, for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, departed from his land with a great army for the succour of the holy land. In the beginning, he captured Sidira [?], where there are twelve cities, and advancing from there he captured the land of Beruth, in which there are eight cities.

Then he captured the land of Sago [Ballasaghun?]. Indeed, from the land of Sago to Quassay [Kashghar?] is a journey of thirty days, and from Quassay to Zarahanna [Ferghana?] and Mema [Marginan?] there are ten days, and from Quassay to Bochara [Bukhārā] 21 days; and in that land's domain there are more than 220 more small villages and castles than in the aforesaid cities. And he crossed the Geon,[28] and captured the land of King Muhammad [the Khwarazmshah], namely the land of Chorassan [Khurasan] and its great cities Amobonda [?], Neyro [?], Maine [?], Serahys [Sarākhs], Thoys [Tūs], Meserdalchi [Mazār-i Balkh], Serastam [?], Channe [?], Nesservari [?], Balch [Balkh], Ochare [?], Balsatam [?], Deri [?], Demelhag [?] and serastam [?]. And [there are] 232 smaller cities and castles. And he came to the land of Senniar [sanjar?][29] and captured it and its great cities are Neshyr [Nishapur?], Ebalbetham [?], Destyara [?], [and] Carcha [?]. And he captured Angelum de Chore [?],[30] and its great cities are eight [in number]. And he captured Mecherdara [Mazandaran] and its entire domain; and its great cities are ten [in number] and 205 castles. And he came to the region of Thaummesach [?], whose domain extends for three months in length and three in width, and he captured it all. And he came to the region of the King Thoyl [Toghrul?], and this is Great Echelath [Iraq?], and its great cities are Kay [Rayy] and Elchar [?], Raytham [?], Theriuch [?] and

Cem [?], Cassam [Qashan], Nassaythar [Nishapur?], Spaamen [?] and Amadam [Hamadan], and [it has] 420 cities and castles. And he came to the region of Darbegani [Diyarbakir], and its great cities are 48 [in number]: Salyem [?], Mema [Mianeh], Channa [?], Barvana [?], Nardeui [Ardebil?], Beleygam [Baylaqān], Chouey [Khonedj], Chardacha [Sardjahan], Inar [?], Mena [?], Naxab [Nakhidjevan?], Salamas [Salmas], Maxraicha [Marāgha], and Herno [Urmiyah?]. And he came to Quieiam [Khūy? Qayen?] and captured it and the domains of Heymyr and Roheyr,[31] and there are 11 great cities and 170 villages and castles. King David has servants with him, 255,000 in number who are not of his law, and 122,000 knights of his law, most highly esteemed in battle. Truly, he brings before himself fourty crosses in place of banners. And behind each cross there are 100 knights on horses. in addition, he captured the two greatest kingdoms of the Persians, and he subdued the Georgians, because they held meetings with the saracens and, having killed many of them, he made them his subject.

Now, at the time this letter was written, he was near Baghdad. The land that he has conquered extends for 251 days' journey.

**Papa Honorius III, *Epistola***

*Date:* 12th March, 1221

Honorius episcopus servus servorum dei venerabilibus fratribus T[heodorico] archiepiscopo Treverensi et suffraganeis ejus salutem et apostolicambenedictionem. Manifeste incepit dominus judicare causam suam, memor improperiorum suorum, que ab insipientibus sunt tota die, voces se querentium non oblitus. Ecce enim, sicut venerabilis frater noster P[elagius] Albanensis episcopus, apostolice sedis legatus, suis nobis litteris intimavit, [quod] rex David, qui presbiter Johannes vulgariter appellatur, vir catholicus et timens deum, in manu potenti Persidem est ingressus et, soldano Persidis bello campestri devicto, terram ejus per .XXIIII. dietas invadens et occupans, in ea tenet quamplures munitas civitates et castra; tantumque ab illa parte processit, ut non nisi per .X. dietas distet ejus exercitus a Baldach, maxima et famosissima civitate, que Kalisti, ejus videlicet, quem Sarraceni suum summum sacerdotem vel pontificem appellant, sedes esse dicitur specialis. Cujus timore soldanus Halapie, frater soldanorum Damasci et Babilonie, vires suas, quas preparaverat contra christianum exercitum, qui Damiate consistit, compulsus est contra regem convertere memoratum. Idem quoque legatus misit nuntios suos in Aviguttam, terram Georgiorum, qui sunt viri catholici

et potentes in armis, rogans et obsecrans, ut et ipsi ex parte sua guerram moveant Sarracenis; unde speramus in domino, quod, si prefatus exercitus Damiate speratum habuerit hac estate succursum, terram Egipti divino preeunte auxilio facile occupabit, cum Sarracenorum vires, quas ad eam defendendam undique congregabant, pro tutandis terre sue lateribus oporteat disgregari. Ideoque fraternitati vestre per apostolica scripta mandamus, quatinus cruce signatos Treverensis provincie exhortemini ad exequenda celeriter vota sua, et si necesse fuerit, compellatis; alios quoque ad subventionem prefati exercitus studeatis sedulis exhortationibus animare. Eos autem, qui transibunt ad exercitus predicti succursum, curetis sollicite premonere, ut equos quanto plures potuerint transvehere non omittant, cum et dextrariorum et aliarum equitaturarum, sine quarum amminiculo exercitus proficisci non potest, grandis penuria sit ibidem, nec venales in illis partibus valeant inveniri.

Datum Laterani, .III. Idus Martii, pontificatus nostri anno .V.

**Pope Honorius III, *Letter***

*Date:* 12th March, 1221

*[This remarkable letter from Pope Honorius III shows the extent to which the idea of Prester John's imminent aid had permeated European political thought at the time of the Fifth Crusade. The King David character, in reality Chingis Khan, is here equated with Prester John rather than being his descendent. Pelagius, who initially told the Pope the story of King David, was himself leader of the Fifth Crusade.]*

Bishop Honorius, servant of the servants of God, to the venerable brothers Theodoric, Archbishop of Trier, and his supporters, greetings and papal blessings. The Lord has clearly begun to judge his cause, mindful of the reproaches directed at Him, which come all day from the foolish, but not forgetting the voices of those who seek Him. For indeed, see how, as our venerable brother P[elagius], the bishop of Albano, legate to the papal seat, has told us in his letters, King David, who is commonly called Prester John, a Catholic and God-fearing man, has entered Persia with a mighty force and, having defeated the Sultan of Persia on the battlefield, is invading and occupying 24 days' worth of his land, in which there are a great many fortified cities and castles, and he has proceeded so far from that region that his army is not even ten days distant from Baghdad, that greatest and most

famous city which is said to be the special seat of the Caliph, the one whom the Saracens call their highest priest or pontiff. In fear of him, the Sultan of Aleppo, the brother of the Sultans of Damascus and Babylon, prepared his forces against the Christian army, which was staying at Damietta, and went against the aforementioned king to repulse him.[32] Indeed, that same legate sent his messengers to Avigutta [Abkhazia], the land of the Georgians, who are Catholic men and powerful in arms, asking and entreating them to go to war against the Saracens from their side, whence we hope in the Lord that if the aforesaid army at Damietta receives the longed-for aid this summer, it will easily seize the land of Egypt, with divine aid dictating it, since the Saracen forces, which are gathering from all directions to defend it, would have to disperse so as to defend the sides of their land. For this reason, we command your brotherhood through [these] papal writings that you urge (and if it is necessary, compel) the crusaders *[crucesignatos]* in the region of Trier to fulfil their vows, and also that you strive to rouse others with assiduous encouragements to come to the assistance of the aforementioned army. But ensure that you anxiously forewarn those who will cross over to help the aforesaid army that they not fail to bring as many horses as they can, both warhorses and other horses, without which support the army is not able to proceed, for there is a great scarcity [of horses] there, nor can they be found for sale in those parts.

Dated at the Lateran, the 3rd of the Ides of March, the 5th year of our pontificate [i.e. 13 March 1221].

**Jacques de Vitry, *Epistola VII***

*Date:* 18th April, 1221

**a)** Sanctissimo patri ac domino H[onorio], dei gratia summo pontifici I[acobus], divina permissione Acconensis ecclesie minister indignus, tam debitam quam devotam cum osculo pedum reverentiam.

**b)** Viris venerabilibus et in Christo karissimis fratri Waltero Villariensi abbati et magistro iohanni de Nivella et fratribus suis de Ognies ceterisque amicis suis in partibus illis commorantibus iacobus, divina permissione Acconensis ecclesie minister indignus, eternam in domino salutem.

**c)** L[eopoldo] dei gratia illustri duci Austrie i[acobus], divina permissione Acconensis ecclesie minister indignus, sic transire per

bona temporalia ut non amittamus eterna.

**d)** Viris venerabilibus et in Christo karissimis stephano decano et Philippo cancellario Parisiensibus et aliis universis magistris et scolaribus in civitate Parisiensi commorantibus i[acobus], divina permissione Acconensis ecclesie minister indignus, talenta sapientie et scientie domino cum usuris reportare.

**e)** Iacobus divina misericordia Acconensis episcopus, omnibus amicis suis salutem in Christo.

[…]

Cum igitur IIII munitiones haberemus in Egypto, Damiatam scilicet et Thanis et Toronum in sabulo et castrum Butavant in lacu amplissimo, nostrorum statu semper in melius crescente, inimicorum conditio vergens ad occasum in deterius profluebat, presertim cum inter se Sarraceni pugnam et dissensiones haberent et rex Damasci Coradinus, qui Castrum Peregrinum obsederat, cum magna confusione, multis ex suis interemptis, recessisset. Frater autem eius dictus seraph, audiens regem indorum David terram suam invasisse, a partibus nostris cum exercitu suo coactus est recedere. Hic autem rex David, vir potentissimus et in armis miles strenuus, callidus ingenio et victoriosissimus in prelio, quem dominus in diebus nostris suscitavit ut esset malleus paganorum et perfidi Machometi pestifere traditionis et execrabilis legis exterminator, est ille quem vulgus presbyterum iohannem appellant. Qui cum fratrum suorum minimus esset, sicut de sancto rege israel David propheta legimus, omnibus prepositus est et in regem divinitus coronatus. Quam mirabiliter autem dominus ipsum his diebus promoverit et eius opera magnificaverit, gressus illius dirigens et populos innumeros, gentes, tribus et linguas eius ditioni subiciens, ex transcripto carte subsequentis patebit, quam de Arabico in Latinum per fideles interpretes, prout melius potuimus, transferre procuravimus.

Excerpta de historia gestorum David regis Indorum, qui presbyter Iohannes a vulgo appellatur.

[…][33]

Que secuntur ex alia carta translata sunt.

[…][34]

Habet autem rex David tres exercitus, quorum unum misit in terram Calaph fratris soldani Egypti, alium misit in Baldach, tertium

misit versus Mausam, que prisco nomine Ninive nuncupatur, et iam non distat ab Antiochia nisi per XV dietas, festinans venire ad terram promissionis ut visitet sepulchrum domini et reedificet civitatem sanctam. Prius tamen proposuit domino concedente subiugare nomini christiano terram soldani Iconiensis et Alapian et Damascum et omnes regiones interiacentes, ut nec unum post se relinquat adversarium. Precedentium litterarum exemplaria attulerunt comiti Tripolitano homines ipsius ex partibus illis venientes, mercatores etiam a partibus Orientis species aromaticas et lapides preciosos deferentes consimiles litteras attulerunt; quotquot autem de partibus illis veniunt idem dicunt. De exercitu etiam nostro quidam a soldano Egypti capti fuerunt, quos fratri suo Coradino misit Damascum; Coradinus misit eos domino suo caliphe Baldacensi, ille autem regi David pro magno munere predictos captivos transmisit. Qui postquam eos christianos esse cognovit, a vinculis absolutos usque Antiochiam reduci precepit, qui predictos rumores et alia quam plurima de rege David nobis retulerunt. Soldanus igitur Egypti per nuntios predicti caliphe Baldacensis audiens predicti regis David insuperabilem potentiam et mirabiles triumphos et qualiter iam fere per ducentas dietas terras Sarracenorum in manu potenti occupasset nec erat qui valeret ei resistere, consternatus animo et mente confusus precepit adduci sibi quosdam nobiles ex nostris quos in carcere Kayri detinebat captivos, electum scilicet Belvacensem et fratrem eius et vicecomitem Bellimontis et Iohannem de Archies et Odonem de Castellione et Andream de Espoisse et quosdam de fratribus Templi et Hostpitalis sancti Iohannis et de domo Theutonicorum, per quos pacem cum nostris se sperabat obtenturum, proprios etiam nuntios in exercitu Damiate cum litteris nobis transmisit modis omnibus attemptans si pacem vel treugas posset habere nobiscum. Christianorum autem exercitus predictis rumoribus exultabat et *confortabatur in domino* et maxime postquam litteras imperatoris Romanorum Frederici recepimus cum nuntiis eius affirmantibus, quod concedente domino cum magna virtute et magnifico apparatu venturus esset in proximo Augusto ad honorem dei et subsidium christianorum.

Anno siquidem preterito liber quidam sarracenorum magne apud ipsos auctoritatis in manus nostras devenit. Hunc autem quidam eorum astrologus, quem prophetam magnum sarraceni reputant, a principio legis eorum cum summo studio scripserat. Predixit autem inter alia multa quanto tempore lex eorum permanere deberet et que sicut gladio inceperat, ita gladio peritura erat. Prophetavit insuper quanta mala saladinus facturus esset christianis et qualiter ante destructionem gentis paganorum et exterminium legis eorum regnum ierusalem cum multis aliis regnis proprie subiceret ditioni, inde vero non tanquam vaticinando, sed quasi historiam ordinate describendo

de recuperatione civitatis Acconensis et de hiis que in exercitu regum Francie et Anglie et aliorum occidentalium principum acciderunt apertissime retulit ac si ea propriis oculis aspexisset. Addidit insuper, sicut oculis nostris vidimus, quecumque usque ad captionem Damiate hiis diebus nobis et sarracenis variis casibus contigerunt et propter hoc aliis, que nondum evenerunt, que ipse in proximo ventura predixit, fidem facilius adhibuimus: prenuntiavit enim qualiter capta Damiata, Alexandriam et Kayrum et Babyloniam et universas Egypti regiones christianorum populus optineret, Damascum preterea et Alapiam et omnes adiacentes provincias christianorum princeps potentissimus in virtute exercitus populi christiani occuparet et civitatem ierusalem cum universa Syria liberaret de manibus paganorum. Quoniam autem qui talia predixit Sarracenus extitit, multi ex nostris verbis eius fidem adhibere noluerunt non advertentes qualiter Balaam ariolus et gentilis de Christo et filiis Israel prophetavit et Nabuchodonosor de futuris regnis et lapide sine manibus de monte exciso sompniavit et Pharao rex egypti fertilitatis future et sterilitatis subsecuture in sompnis previdit enigmata; sed et Cayphas, *cum esset pontifex anni illius, non a se ipso* sed a spiritu sancto prophetavit loquens sicut asina Balaam et que diceret non intellegens, nec aliquem de sanctis prophetis apertius de Christo et utroque eius adventu estimo fuisse locutum quam dominus locutus est per Sybillam: firmius est enim testimonium, quod a parte adversariorum profertur. Vt autem omnis ambiguitas ab hiis qui dubitant tolleretur, hoc presenti anno suriani qui nobiscum erant in exercitu, librum alium antiquissimum lingua sarracenica scriptum de antiquis armariis suis nobis ostenderunt, cuius erat superscriptio: *Revelationes beati Petri apostoli a discipulo eius Clemente in uno volumine redacte.* Quicumque autem libri huius auctor extiterit, ita aperte et expresse de statu ecclesie dei a principio usque ad tempora Antichristi et finem mundi prenuntiavit, quod ex completione preteritorum indubitatam facit fidem futurorum. Prenuntiavit autem inter alia de consummatione seu consumptione perfide legis Agarenorum et qualiter imminente et quasi in ianuis existente destructione paganorum primo civitatem herbosam et aquis circumdatam – sic enim Damiatam appellavit – populus christianorum subiugaturus esset, post hec vero de duobus regibus novis subiungit, quorum unus venturus est a partibus Occidentis, alium a partibus Orientis obviam predicto regi in civitatem sanctam venturum predixit et quod per manus regum predictorum dominus abhominabilem impiorum hominum legem exterminaturus esset multis ex ipsis gladio interemptis, aliis ad fidem Christi conversis, ut *intraret plenitudo gentium* et sic omnis Israel salvus fieret et post hec veniret *filius perditionis* et inde iudicium et finis. Hunc predictum Apocalipsis librum postquam universo populo in sabulo ante Damiatam ad verbum

dei congregato causa consolationis et recreationis ostendimus, non multo post tempore memoratas epistolas et rumores iocundos tam de rege orientali David quam de imperatore Frederico audivimus, sicut in predictis duobus libris prius audieramus. Vnde et populus domini inter labores multiplices et angustias, quas hucusque pro Christo sustinuit, plus quam dicere possemus gavisus est et in Christo servitio confortatus. Confidimus enim in domino, quod *qui cepit ipse perficiet, dilatabit locum tentorii sui et longos faciet funiculos suos* et erit sepulcrum eius gloriosum et *spiritu oris sui interficiet* impium: ipse enim *mortificat et vivificat, deducit ad inferos et reducit,* ipse *pauperem facit et ditat, humiliat et sublevat.* Ipsi honor, virtus et gloria in secula. Amen. Datum in exercitu Damiata octava Pasche.[35]

**Jacques de Vitry, *Letter VII***

*Date:* 18th April, 1221

*[This letter, written from Egypt, details Jacques' state of mind about the stories that were being broadly circulated about King David; in short, he believed them. According to Jacques, the Muslim enemy did too, and in fear sent letters of entreaty to make peace with the crusaders, which they refused. King David was for Jacques the ultimate destroyer coming to help the crusaders vanquish Islam forever. His discovery in Egypt of two prophecies foretelling the end of Islam seemed to confirm this. At the end of this letter, Jacques mentions that they had been waiting for several months for further word from King David, but had heard nothing; Jacques and his fellow crusaders were, however, waiting patiently and hopefully. This delay of several months was a major factor in the failure of the Fifth Crusade. It also seems likely that Jacques preached to the crusaders that Prester John's arrival was imminent.[36]]*

**a)** Jacques, with divine permission the unworthy minister of the church of Acre, to the most holy father and lord Honorius, by God's grace the highest pope, as much by obligation as devotion, [showing] respect with a kiss to the feet.

**b)** Jacques, with divine permission the unworthy minister of the church of Acre, to men venerable and most beloved in Christ, Brother Walter, abbot of Villers-La-Ville, and master John of Nivelles and his brothers from Oignies and his other friends living in those parts, eternal salvation in the Lord.[37]

**c)** Jacques, with divine permission the unworthy minister of the

church of Acre, to Leopold, by God's grace the illustrious duke of Austria, to pass through worldly goods so that we do not lose eternity.

**d)** Jacques, with divine permission the unworthy minister of the church of Acre, to men venerable and most beloved in Christ, Stephen the Deacon and Philip the Chancellor of Paris, and all the other masters and scholars living in the city of Paris, to bring back the finances of wisdom and knowledge to the Lord with interest.[38]

**e)** Jacques, Bishop of Acre by divine mercy, to all his friends, greetings in Christ.

[…]

So when we held four forts in Egypt, namely Damietta, Thanis, Toronum in the sand, and the castle of Butavant on a most large lake, with our situation always getting better, the condition of our enemies taking a turn for the worse, especially since the Saracens were having quarrels and a battle amongst themselves, the King of Damascus, Coradin,[39] who had besieged the Castle of the Pilgrims, withdrew with great confusion, many of his men having been killed. But his brother called seraph,[40] hearing that David, King of the Indians, had invaded his land, was compelled to return from our parts along with his army. But this King David, a most powerful man and a knight strenuous in arms, fiery in nature, and most victorious in battle, whom the Lord roused in our times to be the hammer of pagans and the exterminator of the pestilential tradition and detestable law of the faithless Muhammad; he is the man whom the common people call Prester John. Although he was the smallest of his brothers, as we have read of David the prophet, the holy king of Israel, he was placed before all and crowned as king by divine inspiration. But oh, how the Lord has marvellously pushed him forward these days and amplified his acts!, directing his steps[41] and subjecting to his dominion countless peoples, races, tribes, and languages, as will be known from the copy of the following tract which we managed, as well as we were able, to translate from Arabic into Latin through trustworthy translators.

Excerpts from the history of the deeds of David, King of the indians, who is called Prester John by the common people.

*[Here Jacques includes the text of the first version of the* Relatio de Davide, *which is printed above, on pp. 107–13, Jacques' copy lacks §66]*

The following things have been translated from another tract.

*[Here he has included the text of the second version of the* Relatio de Davide, *which is printed above on pp. 116–17.]*

But King David has three armies, one of which he sent into the land of the Caliph, the brother of the sultan of Egypt, [i.e. al-Ashraf] another he sent to Baghdad, the third he sent towards Mausan [Mosul], which is known by its ancient name Ninive, and now he is only 15 days' journey away from Antioch, hurrying to come to the promised land to visit the sepulchre of the Lord and rebuild the holy city. earlier, however, he proposed, with the Lord allowing it, to subjugate to the Christian name the land of the Sultan of Iconium, Aleppo and Damascus, and all the regions lying in between, so that not even one adversary would remain behind him. His men coming from those parts brought copies of the preceding letters to the Count of Tripoli;[42] also merchants from the eastern parts carrying various spices and precious stones brought similar letters; moreover, all the people coming from these parts say the same thing. Also, certain men from our army were captured by the sultan of Egypt, and he sent them to his brother Coradin in Damascus; Coradin [then] sent them to his lord the Caliph of Baghdad [al-Nasir], but this man sent the aforesaid captives to King David as a great gift. After he learnt that they were Christians, he undertook to lead them back to Antioch freed from their chains; they [then] brought back to us the aforesaid rumours about King David and many more things besides. So the Sultan of Egypt, hearing through the messengers of the aforesaid Caliph of Baghdad of the invincible power of the aforesaid King David and his marvellous triumphs and how he had now seized in his powerful hand almost 200 days' journey of the lands of the Saracens, and that there was no one who was strong enough to resist him, terrified in soul and confused in mind, began to call forth to himself certain nobles of ours who he was holding captive in a prison in Cairo, namely the elect of Beauvais and his brother, the vice-count of Belmont, John of Arques-la-Bataille, Odo of Chatillon, Andrew of Carignon, and certain men of the brothers of the Temple and of the Hospital of Saint John and from the house of the Teutons, through whom he hoped to obtain peace with us. He also sent across to us his own messengers in the army at Damietta with letters, testing in every way if it were possible to have peace or truce with us. But the aforesaid army of the Christians rejoiced at the aforesaid rumours and was strengthened in the Lord[43] and especially after we received the letters of Frederick [II], Emperor of the Romans, with his messengers confirming that, with the Lord allowing it, he was about to come with great strength and sumptuous supplies the next August, to the honour of God and subsidy of the Christians.

Accordingly, last year, a certain book of the Saracens, of great

authority to them, came to our hands. A certain astrologer of theirs, who the Saracens consider to be a great prophet, had written it from the beginning of their law with the greatest devotion.[44] He foretold, among many other things, for how long their law would remain, and that as it had begun by the sword, so it would die by the sword. In addition, he prophesied how many evil deeds Saladin would commit against the Christians and how, before the destruction of the race of the pagans and the extermination of their law, he would subject to his power the kingdom of Jerusalem with many other kingdoms. Truly, because of this, he was not simply soothsaying, but describing [the events] in order, as though it were already history. He reported most clearly on the recapture of the city of Acre and of those things that had taken place in the army of the kings of France and England and the other western princes, as though he had seen them with his own eyes. in addition, he added, as we have seen with our own eyes on various occasions, certain things which have happened to us and to the Saracens these days up to the capture of Damietta, and because of this, with other things which have not yet eventuated, we have readily had faith [in] what that man foretold would come in the near future; indeed, he predicted how a multitude of Christians would obtain Damietta, Alexandria, Cairo, Babylonia, and all the regions of Egypt, as well as how a prince of Christians, most powerful in the strength of his army of Christian people, would seize Damascus and Aleppo and all the neighbouring provinces, and would liberate the city of Jerusalem along with all of Syria from the hands of the pagans. But since the man who foretold such things turned out to be a Saracen, many of our men have refused to have faith in his words, not realising that Balaam the seer and pagan prophesied about Christ and the sons of Israel and how Nebuchadnezzar dreamt about the future kingdoms and the stone cut from the mountain without hands and how Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, foresaw in dreams the enigmas of future fertility and the following barrenness; and also how Cayphas, since he was the highest priest of that year, prophesied, not by himself alone but by the holy spirit, speaking like the ass Balaam and not understanding what he was saying,[45] and I do not estimate anything to have been said openly about the holy prophets, about both Christ and his coming, which the Lord said through the sibyl; indeed, testimony that is advanced from the part of our enemies is more solid. But so that all the ambiguity may be removed from these things that are dubious, in this present year the Syrians who were in the army with us showed us from their old book-cases another most ancient book written in the Saracen language, whose heading was: ‘The Revelations of the blessed Peter the apostle by his disciple Clement, brought together in one volume’. But whoever the author of this book turns out to be, he

foretold so clearly and distinctly about the state of God's church from the beginning up to the time of the Antichrist and the end of the world that, because of the fulfilment of those things already past, he causes [you to have] unquestionable faith [about] the future things [written there]. But he foretold, among other things, about the conclusion or consumption of the treacherous law of the Agarenes [i.e. Muslims], and how with the destruction of the pagans imminent, as though it were standing in a doorway [and about to enter], the people of the Christians will first subjugate the city which is grassy and surrounded with waters, as indeed he calls Damietta, truly after this it comes under the control of two new kings, one of whom he predicted will come from the Western parts, and the other will come from eastern parts into the holy city to meet the aforesaid king, and that through the hands of the aforesaid kings, the Lord will exterminate the detestable law of the wicked men, with many of them killed by the sword, others being converted to the faith of Christ, so that an abundance of peoples may enter and in this way all of Israel will be saved, and after this the son of perdition will come, and then judgement and the end. Later, we showed this aforesaid Book of the Apocalypse to all the people in the sand before Damietta, who had flocked to the word of God for the sake of comfort and encouragement, [but] after a long time, we have not heard any notable letters or pleasant rumours either from David, the eastern king, or from the emperor Frederick, as we had previously heard in the two aforesaid books. Also, from then on, between multiple toils and difficulties, the Lord's people, which up till now held on for the sake of Christ, was glad and comforted in serving Christ more than it is possible for us to say. indeed, we have confidence in the Lord, that he who began [the job] will finish it, prolong the place of his tent, and make long his cords,[46] and his sepulchre will be glorious, and he will kill the impious with the breath of his mouth;[47] indeed, he destroys and creates life, drags down to Hell, and brings back [to life], he makes poor and he enriches, he humbles and lifts up.[48] Honour, virtue and glory to Him forever and ever. Amen.

Dated in the army at Damietta, the octave of Easter [i.e. 18th April, 1221].[49]

**Oliver of Paderborn, *Historia Damiatina***

*Date:* Late 1220s (?)

**35.** Ante captionem Damiate liber nobis apparuit Arabice scriptus,

cuius autor se Judeum vel Christianum vel Sarracenum fuisse negat in illo. Quisquis autem ille fuerit, predixit mala, que Saladinus populo Christiano crudeliter intulit in destructione Tiberiadis, in victoria, quam de Christianis habuit, quando regem Jerusalem et principes eius captivos duxit, civitatem sanctam possedit, Ascalonem destruxit et quomodo conabatur Tyrum comprehendere, sed non profecit, et alia multa, que peccata temporis illius meruerunt. Predixit etiam destructionem hortorum palmeti Damiate civitatis, quam factam vidimus, quando librum hunc per interpretem inspeximus. Addit etiam, Damiatam a Christianis fore capiendam; Saladini nomen non ponit, sed per nigros oculos et crocea vexilla ipsum designat. Insuper predixit, quendam regem Christianorum Nubianorum Mecham civitatem debere destruere et ossa Machometi pseudoprophete dispersa proicere et quedam alia, que nondum evenerunt, sed si completa fuerint, ad exaltationem Christianitatis et depressionem Agarenorum evenient. Scimus quosdam gentiles ethnicos Spiritum sanctum in ore habuisse, sed non in corde et manifeste de Christo prophetasse, unde non miramur, si per canales lapideos purior aqua defluxit.

[…]

**55.** *Incipiam et complebo,* dicit Dominus; *ecce ego faciam verbum, quod, quicunque audierit, tinnient ambe aures eius.* Meum est dominium in regnis hominum, *consilium meum stabit et omnis voluntas mea fiet; non est, qui resistere valeat vultui meo. Non est sapientia, non est prudentia, non est consilium contra dispositionem voluntatis mee. Tamquam momentum statere sic est ante me orbis terrarum, et tamquam gutta roris antelucani, que descendit in terram. Quis dicet mihi, quid fecisti? aut quis stabit contra iudicium meum? Inveni David servum meum, oleo sancto meo unxi eum* regem Indorum, cui precepi iniurias meas vindicare, contra bestiam tot capitum insurgere, cui contra regem Persarum victoriam contuli, magnam partem Asie pedibus eius subieci. Rex Persarum in nimiam elatus superbiam Asie monarcha esse voluit, contra hunc rex David, quem dicunt filium Johannis presbiteri, primitias victorie tulit, deinde reges alios sibi subiugavit et regna, et sicut fama celeberrima nunciante didicimus, non est potestas super terram, que ipsi valeat resistere. Executor creditur esse divine vindicte, malleus Asie.

**56.** Sane post captam Damiatam legatus apostolice sedis recitari fecit in auribus multitudinis summatim et interpretative librum Arabice scriptum, cuius considerantes et contemplantes ligaturam cum cartis vetustum invenimus eundum. Qui Liber Clementis intitulatur, scriptus ut aiunt ab ore principis apostolorum ab ipso Clemente de

revelationibus factis Petro inter resurrectionem et ascensionem a Domino. Incipit autem liber iste a creatione mundi et terminatur in consummatione seculi, in quo precepta salutis et consilia leguntur. interserit autem prophetias, quarum quedam iam evidenter apparent completa, quedam pendent de futuro. inter alias dicitur, civitatem aquosam a Christianis fore capiendam cum civitate una egypti. Additur etiam de Alexandrie captione nec tacetur Damascus, que servos Dei multum cruciavit et cruciat. Additur preterea de duobus regibus, quorum unus asseritur venturus ab Oriente, alius ab Occidente Jerosolimam in illo anno, quo pascha erit tertio die Aprilis. Liber iste cum eo, cuius supra mentionem fecimus, etiam in multis concordat. Huic prophetie littere plurime de victoria regis David scripte cum fama inter Christianos et Sarracenos vulgata suffragantur. Vidimus etiam in argumentum huius rei captivos Christianos a nunciis regis David in Baldach liberatos, quos captos in obsidione Damiate rex Babylonis calipho miserat pro munere.

[…]

**71.** Dum hec aguntur in Egypto, seraphus rex civitatis Medorum Rages [i.e. Edessa], Coradinus dominus Damasci cum principibus de Haaman et Chamela congregata de partibus Orientis equitum multitudine maxima convenerunt apud Chamelam, unde timor magnus incussus erat Antiochenis et Acconensibus aliisque urbibus maritimis, quarum bellatores aberant in expeditionem profecti. suspectam etiam habuit hanc collectionem Castellum album in comitatu Tripolitano. Diu multumque deliberabant prenominati principes, utrum personaliter subvenirent in Egypto, au exercitum dividerent Christianorum obsidendo aliquam munitionem ipsorum. Urgebat potentia regis David, qui victor contra regem Persarum in finibus Persidis et Baldach potenter agebat; propter hoc timebant a finibus suis elongari. Considerabant etiam castrum Hospitaliorum vel Templariorum de facili capi non posse tempore parvo. Prevaluit tandem consilium hortantium profectum in Egyptum …

**Oliver of Paderborn, *History of Damietta***

*Date:* Late 1220s (?)

*[Oliver of Paderborn was present on the Fifth Crusade, and was one of its most intimate chroniclers. He later went on to become Bishop of Paderborn. In essence, his writings on Prester John reinforce the depth to which the Prester John idea had spread throughout those involved with the*

*Fifth Crusade. Oliver's theological tone provides a powerful depiction of King David, here son of Prester John, as the 'Hammer of Asia', and, as with Jacques de Vitry, it seems likely that Oliver delivered sermons to the Fifth Crusaders using similar representations of Prester John. Oliver's account bears many similarities with Jacques', and both were clearly present at the reading of the prophecies, and Oliver tells us that it was on Pelagius' orders that the text was read aloud before a large group of crusaders. At the end of the excerpt, Oliver reveals how fear of King David affected military decision marking in the Holy Land, as well as Egypt.]*

Before the capture of Damietta, a book written in Arabic became known to us, whose author did not say in it whether he was a Jew, a Christian, or a Saracen.[50] But whichever he may have been, he foretold evil things, which Saladin has cruelly inflicted on the Christian people in the destruction of Tyberias, in the victory which he had over the Christians when he led the king of Jerusalem and his princes captive, possessed the holy city, destroyed Ascalon, and how he attempted to seize Tyre, but did not manage to, and many other things, which the sins of that time deserved.[51] He also foretold the destruction of the gardens of palm-trees in the city of Damietta, which we have seen done, when we inspected this book through an interpreter. It also added that Damietta would be captured by the Christians. It did not mention the name of Saladin, but depicted him by means of his black eyes and golden standards. In addition, it foretold that a certain king of the Nubian Christians would destroy the city of Mecca and cast out the scattered bones of Muhammad the false prophet, and many other things which have not yet come to pass, but if they were completed, would result in the elevation of Christianity and the suppression of the Agarenes [i.e. the Muslims]. We know that certain pagan gentiles had the Holy Spirit in their mouths, but not in their hearts, and that they clearly prophesied about Christ. We should not be amazed at this, if purer water flows through stone channels.

[…]

'I will begin and I will make an end', says the Lord. 'Behold! I shall make a word, and whoever shall hear it, both his ears shall ring. Mine is the dominion in the kingdoms of men, My counsel shall stand and all My will shall be done; there is no one who is strong enough to resist My countenance. There is no wisdom, there is no prudence, there is no counsel against the disposition of My will. For the whole world before me is as the least grain of the balance, and as a drop of the morning dew that falls down upon the earth. Who shall say to Me, 'what have you done?' or who shall withstand My judgement? I have

found David, My servant; with My holy oil have I anointed him[52] King of the indians, whom I have ordered to avenge My wrongs, to rise up against the many-headed beast. To him I have brought victory against the King of the Persians. I have placed a great part of Asia beneath his feet'. The King of the Persians, raised into excessive pride, wished to be the monarch of Asia. King David, who they call the son of Prester John, won the first fruits of victory against him, then he subjugated to himself other kings and kingdoms, and as we have learned from a report that has reached far and wide, there is no power on earth strong enough to resist him. He is believed to be the executor of divine vengeance, the hammer of Asia.

Certainly, after the capture of Damietta, the legate to the apostolic seat [i.e. Pelagius] ordered the book written in Arabic to be briefly read aloud by an interpreter to the ears of the multitude; examining and observing its bindings along with the pages, we found it to be beyond ancient. It is entitled *The Book of Clement,*[53] written so they say from the mouth of the prince of the apostles by Clement himself[54] about the revelations made to Peter between the resurrection and the ascension by the Lord. This book begins with the creation of the world and concludes with the end of time; the teachings and precepts for salvation are read in it. it also mentions prophecies, some of which have evidently now been completed, and some of which hang in the future. Amongst other things, it is said that a city abounding in water would be captured by the Christians along with one city of Egypt. It mentions the capture of Alexandria, nor is Damascus left unmentioned, which greatly tormented and [still] torments God's servants. it thereafter discusses two kings who will come to Jerusalem, one of which it is said will come from the East, the other from the West, and which will take in the year in which Easter will fall on the third day of April.[55] This book is also in many ways in agreement with that which we made mention of above. The great many letters written about the victory of King David,[56] along with his common fame amongst Christians and Saracens, lend support to this prophecy. Also, as proof of this, we saw captive Christians freed by King David's messengers in Baghdad, whom the King of Babylon captured at the siege of Damietta and sent to the Caliph as a gift.

[…]

Whilst these things were taking place in Egypt [i.e. the Christian attack], Seraphus, King of the city of Rages [i.e. Edessa], Coradin, the Lord of Damascus, with the princes of Hamah and Homs [in Syria], having amassed a huge army with a multitude of cavalrymen from the eastern parts, they came together near Homs, because of which, a

great fear struck the inhabitants of Antioch, Acre, and the other coastal cities, whose warriors were absent, having been sent on an expedition. Those at the White Castle, in the County of Tripoli, were especially concerned about this gathering of troops. The aforenamed princes deliberated long and earnestly whether they themselves should come to the aid of Egypt, or divide the Christian armies by besieging one of the Saracens' fortresses. They were influenced by the power of King David, the conqueror who was powerfully driving forward against the King of the Persians at the borders of Persia and Baghdad, and on account of him they were afraid to go far from their lands. They also reflected that the castles of the Hospitallers or the Templars could not easily be captured in a short time. Finally, the counsel of those urging advance into Egypt prevailed …

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1 On the date, see R.B.C. Huygens (ed.), *Serta Mediaevalia,* in *CCCM,* vol.171 (Turnhout, 2000), pp.534–5

2 For more detail, see p. 97.

3 Wisdom 11:25

4 1 Timothy 2:4; Luke 11:23; Mark 9:39

a B: 'Bulchabot'; A: 'Bidgaboga'; C: 'Bulgaboga Nestorinorum'

b B: 'Canchana'; D: 'Chancara'

c A, B: 'Chasar'

d B: 'Bellazacum'; C: 'Bellagacum'; A: 'Bellasichum'; D: 'Bellagarum'

e A, B: 'Geos'

f A, B: 'Ganichi'

g A, B, C: 'Damachagi', D: 'Machachi'; Zarncke has followed the reading in D arguing that 'Machachi' is a contraction of 'Mahachina', i.e. 'Great China'. see Zarncke, Abh.2, p.32

h D: 'in terram israel'

i C: 'Damagatha'

j C: 'Chasahar, Agagya'

k B: 'Latehelicum'

l A: 'Bissibehe, Lech'; B: 'Bessibehelec'

m B: 'et. c. Chacen'

n B: 'Asguhent'

o B: 'Caogent'

p B: 'Bachara'

q B: 'Againa'

r A: 'Acasar'; C: 'sunt a Chasahar'; B: 'Et a Termagasar'

s C: 'Pharnaga'

t B: 'Caogent'; C: 'Chaegunt'

u C: 'Chaegunt'

v C: 'Racharam'

w C: 'Ragani'

x B: 'Zarunch'; C: 'Gamarith'

y C: 'Gam arith'

z B: 'Bocarigu'; C: 'Abocharith' instead of 'ad Bokarichi'

aa C: 'Bocharith'; B: 'Bocarigu'

bb C: 'Alnar'; B: 'Abaar'

cc C: ‘a Garmich’ B: ‘ararunch’ (‘a zarunch’?)
dd C: ‘Rabasithim’
ee B: ‘Alaanarum’; A: ‘Alanar’
ff A: ‘Alanar’
gg C: ‘Casne’; A: ‘Gafne’; B: ‘Cabie’
hh A: ‘Alanar’
ii B: ‘Catha’; A: ‘Chanta’; D: ‘Chara’
jj D: ‘Chara’; C: ‘de Catha’; A: ‘Chatarum’
kk B: ‘Cavarmisam’; A: ‘Chanarsmisan’
ll A: ‘Bochar Samarchant Bellefetum’; B: ‘Bochar Samarcant Bellaseth’; C: ‘Rothar et aliae duae’; D: ‘Bacharim et Sarmachant et Bellecharim’
mm A, B: ‘Geos’
nn A: ‘Chorasam’; B: ‘Gorosam’
oo B: ‘de Arbethem’
pp C: ‘Almanger’; B: ‘Elevanz’
qq A: ‘Ledinalha’; B: ‘Ledmabula’
rr A, B: ‘Ramasne’; C: ‘Romangur’
ss A: ‘Monthadi’; B: ‘Moucadi’
tt C: ‘Iaffeleth’; A: ‘Iaffelech’; B: ‘Aphelech’
uu D: ‘Destolinorum’; B: ‘Indorum’; A: ‘Iudaeorum’
vv A, B: ‘Geos’
ww B: ‘103’
xx B: ‘202’
yy B: ‘202’
zz A: ‘Geos’
a B: ‘Choatesmeum’; C: city names absent, replaced by ‘viginti quatuor magnas civitates … praeter alia … D: city names absent, replaced by ‘viginti quatuor magnas civitates … praeter … ‘
b B: ‘et Meabendi’ instead of ‘et Moa et Bendei’
c B: ‘Tibris’
d B: ‘Maurvum’
e A: ‘Chios’
f B: ‘Tersis’
g B: ‘Corassam’
h B: ‘Nichaguar’
i B: ‘Temed’
j B: ‘Linguardan’
k B: ‘Vasa’
l B: ‘Baston’; A: ‘Balfan’; Zarncke has inserted ‘Bastem’ in the edition from §2 of the second version of the *Relatio*
m B: ‘Hedemagam’
n B: ‘Belcha’
o B: ‘Cerigi’
p B: ‘segestem’
q B: ‘sabarstam’
r B: ‘Messedenh’
s B: ‘Melim’
t B: ‘sethen’
u B: ‘semar’; C: ‘salmar’; D: ‘Cattay’
v B: ‘Misaurum’
w B: ‘Delbican’
x B: ‘Desicham’
y B: ‘Chuetam’

z C: ‘Delgor’; B: ‘Delgoc’; D: ‘Dolgoy’
aa D: ‘de Marendran’; A: ‘Demarendram’; C: ‘de Maredran’; B: ‘de Marendumer’
bb C: ‘Cuarmischa’; B: ‘Guarinsaham’
cc D: ‘Tagyel’
dd A: ‘Rahi’; B: ‘Fax’
ee B: ‘Aer’
ff B: ‘Iohem’
gg B: ‘Sebem Enec’
hh B: ‘Seheman’
ii A: ‘Causnin’; B: ‘Casurn’
jj B: ‘Cenean’
kk B: ‘Cames, Chaseam’
ll B: ‘Ebeban’
mm B: ‘Sangarahau’
nn B: ‘Cengeham’
oo B: ‘Choone’
pp B: ‘Aimana’
qq A: ‘Dediarbakan’; D: ‘de Diarbachan’; B: ‘Diabertam’; C: ‘de Biarachan’
rr B: ‘Nurcis’
ss B: ‘Heboran’
tt B: ‘Bellacan’
uu B: ‘Cheai’
vv B: ‘Chang’
ww B: ‘Eschemi’
xx B: ‘Annume’
yy C: ‘Cancha’; B: ‘Chanta’
zz C: ‘viginti sex’
a B: ‘Ebibich’; C: ‘Ebibec’
b C: ‘Musehec’; B: Ammusther’
c C: ‘Barheselem’; B: ‘Deteselem’; A: ‘Darcheschen’
d C: ‘Iaffeleth’; B: ‘iaphelec’; D: ‘iafelyo’
e C: ‘Melichalehem’
f D: ‘Chasvin’; C: ‘Chasum’; B: ‘Chasiuvi’

5 The Latin *filii regis Israel* could mean either ‘the son of King Israel’ or ‘the son of the king *of* Israel’, which may explain the excitement among the Jewish population over the next two decades, for which see Peter Jackson, *The Mongols and the West, 1221–1410* (Harlow, 2005), pp.143–4. Jean Richard, in his French translation, preferred the former sense: Jean Richard, *Au-delà de la Perse et de l’Armenie* (Turnhout, 2005), p.41. I am particularly indebted to the latter work for my interpretations of some of the place names in this and the following two texts.

6 Bilge Böge was the grandfather of Küchlüg the Naiman, who in 1211 took over the ailing Kara-Khitan empire founded by Yēlǘ Dàshí, and who was himself defeated by Chingis Khan in 1218. See Jean Richard, ‘L’Extrême orient lêgendaire au Moyen Age: Roi David et Prêtre Jean’, *Annales d’Éthiopie,* vol.2 (1955–57), pp.225–42 (here p.234). How Küchlüg became David remains unexplained. Perhaps Küchlüg became Arabic *Dāwūd,* whence David, or perhaps the Christians conflated him with David Soslan, leader of Georgia famous for his exploits against the Muslims throughout the early thirteenth century, and who was allied with the Crusaders at a number of points. These are all, of course, speculations.

7 The title is *Khān-i Khānān,* meaning ‘khan of khans’.

8 Where they are obvious, the modern place names have been included in square brackets. Those requiring discussion have been footnoted.

9 The River Gihon, here Geon, is one of the four rivers of the terrestrial

paradise as described in Genesis 2:10–14. The river being referred to in our text is the modern Amu Darya, usually known to Latin authors as the Oxus, and to the Arabic geographers as the Jayhūn.

10 Zarncke has Machachi in his edition, arguing that it is a distorted form of *Mahachina,* meaning 'Great China', an interpretation which has been followed by Abraham d'Ohsson, Henry Yule, and Jean Richard, for which see Richard, *Au-delà de la Perse et de l'Arménie,* p.43, n.4. However, 'Machachi' only appears in one manuscript variant; all the others read Damachagi (nominative form: Damachag), which seems likely to be a corruption of *Tamghāj,* a Turkic name for China.

11 A distortion of *Ma warā al-nahr,* the Arabic name for Central Asia, meaning 'that which is beyond the river' (i.e. the land north of the Amu Darya).

12 Kara-Khitan → Khita → Chata.

13 Arach = Iraq. Great Arach presumably refers to Arab Iraq (roughly equivalent to the modern nation state), and Small Arach to Persian Iraq, an obsolete geographical term referring to central Iran.

14 al-Nāsr al-Dīn Allah, Caliph of Baghdad from 1180 to 1225. His honorary name translates as 'the victor for the religion of God'. His father and predecessor as Caliph was al-Mustadi. His given name, however, was Ahmed, but 'Romanzur' seems to preserve the Arabic *al-mansūr,* a common honorific which does in fact mean 'victorious by divine aid'.

15 Iaphelit is a corruption of the Greek 'katholikos', the leader of the Church of the East, which seems to have morphed through *iakelinus* into various corrupted forms in western Latin accounts, including Iapheles, Iafelyo, Iaselich, Iacelich, etc. It is likely that Latin readers would have seen Iaphelit and other such forms as a name, rather than a title, especially in our case since a title is provided after Iaphelit. See Zarncke, *Abh.2,* p.51, footnote z

16 The precise fate of the Khwārazm-shāh 'Ala al-Dīn Muhammad, who fled after being defeated by the Mongols in 1220–21, is still obscure, although Ibn al-Athīr writes that he died on an island in the Caspian Sea. See Ibn al-Athīr, D.S. Richards (trans.), vol.3, p.211

17 If Sanjār is meant here, then this is a chronological error of more than half a century. See Otto of Freising, above pp. 44–5.

18 The dominions of the last of the Seljük Sultans of Iran, Toghrul III, killed in battle in 1194 with the Khwārazmshāh Tekish, who had annexed most of his territory in western Iran: see Barthold, *Turkestan down to the Mongol Invasions,* pp.346–7; Bosworth, 'The political and dynastic history of the Iranian world (A.D. 1000–1217)', in Boyle (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Iran,* vol.5 (Cambridge, 1968), pp.181–2

19 Possibly corrupted by the addition of the Turkish locative suffix '-te/-de'

20 Dār as-Salām, better translated as 'house of peace'.

21 i.e. al-Kāmil, Sultan of Egypt from 1218–1238, who was known to the Latins in the Crusader states as Meledin, with variants thereon. In medieval usage, Babylon often signified Cairo.

a B: 'Baracher'
b B: 'Bogrich'
c B: 'Sachim'
d B: 'Sachier'
e B: '40'
f A: 'Acargana'
g B: 'terras Cogent'
h B: 'Dachara'
i B: '366'
j B: 'sex'

k B: ‘Arsmoc’
l B: ‘Satchere’
m B: ‘260’
n B: ‘Machemorum’
o A: ‘Corellen’
p B: ‘Amonzen’
q B: ‘Sireos’
r B: ‘Tos’
s B: ‘et Mahum’
t B: ‘Dubuli’
u B: ‘Seresten’
v B: ‘Haborm’
w B: ‘Nesaur’
x B: ‘Herce’
y A: ‘Basten’
z B: ‘Seeri’
aa B: ‘Damarichasi’
bb B: ‘232’
cc B: ‘Scenecha’
dd B: ‘Nessier’
ee B: ‘Vibangari’
ff B: ‘Devestam’
gg B: ‘Gargau’
hh B: ‘de Cantun: et de Herim’
ii B: ‘Regines Maaharem. Rediamos’ instead of ‘regiones Maherentzedran’
jj B: ‘Chaoreth, Sevahem, unde veniunt optimi bocaramni, Homerat’
kk B: ‘quatuor’
ll B: ‘Therendel., Barach’
mm B: ‘de Biang’
nn B: ‘Ierahe’
oo B: ‘Hasaharum’
pp B: ‘Chachasm’
qq B: ‘Chan’
rr B: ‘Casehen’
ss B: ‘bagaramni’; A: ‘bocarii’
tt B: ‘Hamet’
uu B: ‘320’
vv B: ‘Sardaham’
ww B: ‘Haema’
xx B: ‘Marchiam’
yy B: ‘Celeniestrim’
zz B: ‘Marahache’
a B: ‘admirabilem Bobacce’
b B: ‘Chome’
c B: ‘Chu’
d B: ‘320’ instead of ‘magnas’
e B: ‘6’

22 This name is obscure, but probably represents ‘Begrichan’ = Bughra Khan, the title borne by several members of the defunct Muslim dynasty of the Qarakhanids, who had reigned over Transoxiana and Turkestan from the tenth to the early thirteenth century, most recently under Kara-Khitan overlordship, and had then been eliminated by Khwārazmshāh ‘Alā al-Dīn Muhammad in 1211–12. See Jean Richard, ‘The *Relatio de Davide* as a source for Mongol History and the Legend

of Prester John', in *PJMTLT,* p.141

23 see p. 108, n.9.

24 Jean Richard explains *(Au-delà de la perse et de l'Arménie,* p.52, n.33) that Meshed was known to the Latins as the *Maummerie Dadli* ('Temple of Ali') because of a famous shrine there dedicated to a celebrated relative of the prophet Muhammad: Imam 'Ali al-Ridā (c.765–818).

25 Kai-Khosrau the First, Seljuk Sultan of Anatolia, who passed away in 1211.

26 A buckram is a fine cotton cloth which took its name from the city of Bukhara, in modern Uzbekistan.

27 This may be a reference to the Islamic practice of rubbing a newborn baby's shaved head with saffron as part of a ritual quasi-baptismal practice known as '*aqīqah,* thus suggesting that Maragheh, a fertile plain area, may have been known for producing saffron. This is speculation.

a B: 'et post cepit'; C: 'deinde cepit' b B: 'Fago' c B: 'Fagon' d B: 'et' absent e C: 'Sunt autem de terra Sago usque Quassay XXX dietae' f B: 'Cassay' g C: 'Zarahanna et Mema' h A: 'Quissant' B: 'et de Cassay sunt .xl. diete usque Sarahanna et Meine. De Meina usque Caussat decem diete. De Cassat' i B: 'XX' j B: 'et' absent k A: 'Bochar' l B: 'Elzanoc'; C: 'Elcharnach' m B: 'et' absent n B: 'Elzarnoc'; C: 'Elcharnach' o B: 'Beleseco'; C: 'Beletho' p B: 'XX' q C: 'tam' absent r B: 'transiit' s B: 'Gion'; C: 'Geon' t B: 'Mehemot' u C: 'terram' v A: 'Thorasanen'; C: 'Chorassanem' w C: 'civitates eius' x B: 'Beda'; C: 'Amobonda' y B, C: 'Neyro' z B, C: 'Et' absent from here until the end of the list of cities aa C: 'Marne' bb A: 'Sochrays' C: 'Serahys' cc B: 'Tois'; C: 'Thoys' dd B: 'Meserdalhi' (?); C: 'Meserdalchi' ee A: 'sarastani'; C: 'serastam' ff B: 'Baharnebani'; C: 'Channe' gg B: 'Tiesevar'; C: 'Nesservari' hh C: 'Balch' ii C: 'Ochare'; B: 'Balchore' instead of 'Balo et Ochore' jj B: 'Basararam'; C: 'Balsatam' kk B: 'sery'; C: 'Deri' ll B: 'Demohac'; C: 'Demelhag' mm 'et serastam' in C only nn C: 'in' oo B, C: '.CC.XXXii'. pp B: 'et venit dominus' qq B: 'Senýar'; C: 'Senniar' rr C: 'eius civitates' ss B: 'Nehýr'; C: 'Neshyr' tt B, C: 'et' absent from here until the end of the list of cities uu B: 'Heliabecam'; C: 'Ebalbetham' vv B: 'Destaham'; C: 'Destyara' ww B: 'Carca'; C: 'Carcha' xx C: 'angelum de Rore' (?) yy B: 'sunt civitates magne octo'; C: 'sunt eius civitates magnae VHP zz B: 'Marchadaram'; C: 'Mecherdara' a C: 'sunt eius' b B: 'decem magne civitates' c B: 'Cauthamessali'; C: 'Thaummesach' d B: 'in latum et tres in longum' e B: 'Thoril' f B: 'Elcalar' g C: 'Echelath magna' h C: 'eius civitates' i A, C: 'Kay' j C: 'et' absent; B: 'et' absent in the whole city list k B: 'Eshar'; C: 'Elchar' l C: 'et' absent m C: 'Raytham' n C: 'et' absent o A: 'Tervittem'; C: 'Theriuch' p A: 'Com' absent; C: 'Cem' q C: 'et' absent r C: 'et' absent s B: 'Nassavar'; C: 'Nassaythar' t C: 'et' absent u B: 'spaham'; C: 'spaamen' v B: 'Anradam' w A, C: 'parvis' absent x B, C: '.CCCC.XX.' y A: 'regiones' z A: 'Bardegam'; C: 'Barbegam' aa B: 'et sunt xl.viii. magne civitates, scilicet'; C: 'et sunt eius civitates magnae XLVIII' bb B: 'Meena'; C: 'Saylem, Mema' cc B, C: 'et' absent in city list dd B: 'Chauna'; C: 'Channa' ee B: 'Baruana'; C: 'Barvana' ff B: 'Vardenyl' (or 'Nardenyl'?); C: 'Nardeui' gg B: 'Beleyga'; C: 'Regsoysam' hh C: 'Chouey' ii B: 'Zardeham' jj B: 'Drinýna'; C: 'Chardacha, inar, Mena' instead of 'Cardahahin et Armina' kk B: 'Marand'; C: 'Naxab' ll B: 'Maraýcha'; C: 'Maxraicha' mm C: 'Herno' nn B: 'quēiā'; C: 'Quieiam' oo B: 'et' absent pp B: 'Rebereir'; C: 'Heymyr et Roheyr' qq A, C: 'parve' absent rr B: 'secum servos'; C: 'Habet rex David servos secum numero' ss B: 'miliaria' tt C: 'qui de sua lege non sunt' uu B: 'et' absent vv C: 'CXXII' ww The text ends here in B xx C: 'probatissimorum in acie' yy C: 'Defert vero' zz C: 'unamquamque' a C: 'sunt C milites in equis' b C: 'Cepit eciam'

[c] C: 'Iorianos'
[d] C: 'arengas'
[e] C: 'et multis ex eis interfectis sibi subiugavit eosdem'
[f] C: 'erat iam'
[g] C: 'Baldach [three or four words rubbed off] factae sunt'
[h] C: 'Terra vero quam cepit durat dietis CL et una'

28 i.e. the Gihon. See p. 108, n.9.

29 see p. 112, n.17.

30 Richard suggests a conflation of the pronunciation of Ghor and the vision of an angel from Daniel 10-12 concerning Persia: Richard, *Au-delà de la Perse et de l'Arménie,* p.37, n.11

31 Another corrupted phrase, which probably designates something like 'the Amīr Abū Bakr', i.e. the Ildegizid atabeg Abū Bakr ibn Pahlawān of Azerbaijan who had died in 1210: see C.E. Bosworth, 'ildeñizids or Eldigüzids' in *Encyclopaedia of Islam,* new edition by Ch. Pellat et al. (Leiden, 1954–2004).

32 These people are respectively al-Mu'azzam Isa (a.k.a. Coradin), Sultan of Damascus from 1218–27, al-'Ashraf Musa, Governor of al-Jezira from 1201–37, and al-Kamil, Sultan of Egypt from 1218–38. These three brothers were all sons of al-Adil I (Saphadin), and nephews of Saladin.

33 Here follows the text of the first version of the *Relatio de Davide,* which is printed above, on pp. 107–13 Jacques' copy lacks §66

34 Here he has included the text of the second version of the *Relatio de Davide,* which is printed above on pp. 116–17.

35 Dating present in two manuscript variants only

36 See *Chronicon Sancti Martini Turonensis* in Appendix 1, below on p. 276. See also Martin Gosman, 'La lègende du prêtre Jean et la propagande auprès des croisés devant Damiette 1218–1221', in Danielle Buschinger (ed.), *La croisade, réalité, et fiction* (Göpingen, 1989), pp.133–42

37 These locations are all in the Walloon province of southern Belgium.

38 Matthew 25:14–30

39 Coradin is a common western designation for Al-Mu'azzam, Ayyubid sultan of Damascus from 1218–27.

40 Al-Ashraf, Ayyubid governor of al-Jazira (now northwestern Iraq, northeastern syria and southeastern Turkey) from 1201–37, and also brother of Al-Mu'azzam.

41 Psalms 16:9

42 Bohemond IV of Antioch, ruler of Antioch from 1219–33

43 Ephesians 6:10

44 This work is one of two discussed by de Vitry. This first one receives no title, but he later gives the second the title 'The Revelations of the blessed Peter the apostle by his disciple Clement, brought together in one volume'. These two works are now lost, but several similar texts in Latin and Old French have been preserved; these are edited in Reinhold Röhricht, *Quinti Belli Sacri Scriptores Minores* (Geneva, 1879), pp.205–28.

45 For Balaam see Numbers 22–4. For Nebuchadnezzar, see Daniel 2. For Pharaoh, see Genesis 41:1–36. For Caiaphas, see John 11:45–56

46 Isaiah 54:2

47 II Thessalonians 2:8

48 I samuel 2:6–7

49 See R.B.C. Huygens (ed.), *Serta Mediaevalia,* in *CCCM,* vol.171 (Turnhout, 2000), pp.536–7

50 See Jacques de Vitry above on pp. 132–4, who discusses two such books.

51 Referring to the events associated with Saladin's capture of the Crusader

States in 1187.

[52] 1 Kings 3:11–12 [a.k.a. 1 samuel]; Isaiah 46:10, Jeremiah 49:19, Proverbs 21:30, Wisdom 11:23, 12:12, Psalms 88:21

[53] See above, p. 132, n.44.

[54] Clement of Alexandria, a Christian theologian who lived c.150-215

[55] Easter was to fall on 3rd April in 1222, and then not again until 1233, a factor that seems to have been a part of Pelagius' decision making process. For the dates, see A. Cappelli, *Cronologia, Cronografia a Calendario Perpetuo* (Milan, 7th ed., 1998), p.60. See also Christopher Eric Taylor, 'Waiting for Prester John: The Legend, the Fifth Crusade and Medieval Holy War' (M.Phil. thesis, University of Texas, 2011), pp.51–8

[56] i.e. the *Relatio de Davide* texts, and others which are now lost.

# Section 3 – Mongols and Travel Writers (Mid-Thirteenth to Fourteenth Centuries)

*The advent of the Mongols in the early thirteenth century changed European perceptions of the world indelibly. No longer was Europe characterised by an eternal struggle with the Saracen; now European leaders both secular and ecclesiastical began to realise the danger and the potential that Asia presented. In recognition of this, many missionaries were sent eastwards with the charge of converting the Mongol khans and gathering information about the threat they posed. Prester John features in a number of these accounts, and for the first time a number of European writers began to wonder whether his fame was justly deserved.*

*These travel accounts can be roughly divided into two categories: the sceptics (like William of Rubruck and Odoric of Pordenone), and the extenders, who added to the stories through invention and/or misinterpretation (like Marco Polo and John Mandeville). The latter texts were far more popular than the former, and thus the legendary character of Prester John was extended rather than undermined by travel. By contrast, the sceptical writers remained largely unknown, and even they were not sufficiently confident to state that Prester John had never existed at all, merely that his fame was not justified because his kingdom was not as impressive as its reputation suggested. Indeed, the popularity of the likes of Marco Polo and Mandeville was so great that even in the early modern period academic writers relied on them as geographical authorities, therefore extending the legend several centuries further.*

**Albericus Trium Fontium, Chronica**

*Date:* Between 1232 and 1241

*Anno 1165*

[…]

Et hoc tempore presbiter Iohannes Indorum rex litteras suas multa admiratione plenas misit ad diversos reges christianitatis, specialiter autem imperatori Manueli Constantinopolitano et Romanorum imperatori Frederico, ex quibus litteris quedam hic annotatus: *Presbiter Iohannes potentia et virtute Dei et domini nostri Iesu Christi rex regum et domnus domnorum terrenorum Emanueli Remeon gubernatori, salutem,* etc. *Precello virtute et potentia omnes reges universe terre; 72 reges nobis tributarii existunt. Quia plures sunt christiani* etc. que secuntur usque: *habemus et palatium aliud quod factum per revelationem patri meo qui vocabatur Quasi-Deus.*

[…]

*Anno 1170*

[…]

Inveniuntur quedam pape Alexandri littere, quas misit presbitero Iohanni superius memorato, per quendam episcopum Philippum ab eodem papa ordinatum et de fide et de moribus sancte Romane ecclesie diligenter instructum. Qui Philippus ab eodem presbitero Iohanne transmissus fuerat ad papam Romanum …

[…]

*Anno 1220*

Post captionem Damiete quedam inventa est prophetia in templo sarracenorum litteris Chaldeis scripta, quam domnus Pelagius, Albanensis episcopus cardinalis et legatus in partibus illis, in Latinum fecit transferri, et misit Romam domno pape, quam quidam magister Iacobus, constitutus a domno papa legatus Hibernie, a Roma detulit Claramvallem, tendens Hiberniam. in hac prophetia astronomica multa continebantur de hiis, que preterita sunt in terra promissionis, de Noradino, de Salahadino, de captione Ierusalem, de duobus regibus Philippo Francie, Richardo Anglie, qui Acram recuperaverunt, de subversione Ascalonis et de multis aliis, iam factis in terra promissionis, et quod anno 29 ab Acra recuperata capienda esset a christianis Damieta, et de Pelagio cardinali multa ibi notabantur, que forte aliter se habuerunt.

Huiusmodi enim prophetia, licet in aliquibus verum dicat, in multis tamen decipit. Notabatur etiam in illa prophetia, quod a parte orientali debet venire quidam rex, qui vocabitur nomine David, et a parte occidentali debet venire alius rex, qui terram sarracenorum

usque Ierusalem destruet, et quod mense Iulio debet fieri bellum apud Kayrum in Egypto inter Sarracenos et christianos.

[…]

*Anno 1221*

Hic scribit summus pontifex Honorius omnibus archiepiscopis Galliarum, cardinalem Pelagium scripsisse a partibus transmarinis, quod rex David, qui presbiter Iohannes appellatur, vir timens Deum, in manu potenti Persidem ingressus et soldano Persidis bello campestri devicto, terram eius per 24 dietas invadens et occupans, in ea tenet quamplures munitas civitates et castra; tantumque ab illa parte processit, ut nonnisi per 10 dietas distet exercitus eius a Baudas, maxima et famosa civitate, que calife, eius videlicet, quem Sarraceni suum summum sacerdotem appellant, sedes esse dicitur specialis.

Cuius timore soldanus Halapie, cognatus soldanorum fratrum Damasci et Babilonie, vires suas, quas preparaverat contra christianum exercitum qui Damiate consistit, compulsus est contra regem convertere memoratum; et quod idem legatus Pelagius misit nuncios suos in Avigniam, terram Georgianorum, qui sunt viri catholici et potentes in armis, rogans et obsecrans, ut et ipsi ex parte sua guerram moveant Sarracenis.

In litteris etiam, quas miserunt Templarii, legebatur, quod idem rex David in partibus Orientis iuxta Persidem quoddam regnum acquisivit, in quo sunt 300 civitates, exceptis castellis et casalibus, et aliud regnum, in quo sunt 300 circiter cum castellis, flumina 66 currentia, et quod exercitum suum in 40 partibus divisit, et qualibet parte 100000 pugnatorum constituit. Et que hic scribuntur de rege David, facta sunt hoc anno; quidquid inde, factum est anno precedenti. In isto quoque anno nunciatum est in Francia, quod idem rex David vel eius, ut quidam dicebant, filius iam venerat in Comaniam, que est ultra Hungariam et in partibus Russie.

Ubi quasdam terras incredulorum destruxit et maxime Comanorum, et habuit ibi fortissimum bellum per menses 5; de Russis etiam sibi resistentibus multa milia, de Prutenis quoque paganis absque numero interfecit; et quod magna civitas Tornax, id est Ornacia, ab eis destructa est, ad quam mercatores de longinquis partibus ibant; et ferebatur, quod in exercitu eorum erant reges 40, archiepiscopi vel episcopi 60; et moratus est idem rex David circa partes illas fere per biennium; et multa alia de eis incredibilia sunt dicta, sed hec pauca sufficiunt; dicunt enim quidam, quod neque christiani sunt neque Sarraceni …

*Anno 1222*

Supra dictus rex David et exercitus eius quos Hungari et Comani Tartaros vocabant – et adhuc sequaces eorum in partibus transmarinis Tartar cognominantur, – cum audissent Damietam esse perditam, per insulas maris prout melius potuerunt in patriam suam recesserunt et tota fama que de illis sparsa fuit in brevi evanuit …

*Anno 1234*

[…]

In partibus transmarinis tempore induciarum veniebant multi de remotis terris ad sepulchrum Domini; et inventum est novem esse leges seu novem speciales esse ordines christianitatis, de quibus singulis ad sepulchrum Domini peregrini ibi more suo celebrant presbiteri de omnibus videlicet ordinibus istis. Horum primus est ordo nostrorum christianorum, Latinorum videlicet, id est Romanorum, et bene sunt in ordine isto 700 episcopatus, qui obediunt domno pape specialiter. Secundus est ordo Grecorum atque Russorum, qui licet a se differant in quibusdam, pro uno tamen ordine conputantur. Tertius ordo surianorum est ab origine christianitatis in partibus transmarinis existentium; istis annectuntur Nestoriani, qui adhuc degunt in partibus illis. Quartus ordo Armeniorum prope Antiochiam et ultra Minorem Asiam degentium, et cum eis conputantur Moriani. Quintus est ordo Georgianorum et Avignianorum christianorum, ultra Armenios terram magnam incolentium; horum autem clerici habent coronas rotundas, layci vero quadratas. Sextus ordo Iacobianorum, qui a diebus imperatoris Marciani viri catholici et impiissimi Nestorii cepisse dicuntur; isti uno solo digito se signant et signum crucis faciunt. Septimus ordo dicitur Nubianorum christianorum, quorum terra maxima est, et multi ex eis tributarii Sarracenorum sunt. Octavus ordo totam illam multitudinem christianorum continet, que presbitero Iohanni subiecta est. Nonus ordo est Maronitarum …

*Anno 1237*

[…]

Erant enim hoc tempore Tartari quidam populus barbarusk sub potestate presbiteri Iohannis constitutus. Quos cum presbiter Iohannes in bello, quod habuit contra Medos et Persas, in adiutorium suum advocasset et eos in forteritiis et munitionibus locasset, illi, videntes se esse fortiores, presbiterum Iohannem occiderunt et terram eius ex

magna parte occupaverunt, regem unum super se statuentes, quasi ipse esset presbiter Iohannes; et ex tunc fecerunt multa malal in terra, ita etiam quod hoc anno 42 episcopos in maiore Armeniam interfecerunt. Igitur rumor erat, hunc populum Tartarorum in Comaniamn et Hungariam velle venire; sed utrum hoc verum sit, missi sunt de Hungaria quatuor fratres Predicatores, qui usque ad veterem Hungarian! per 100 dies iverunt. Qui reversio nunciaverunt, quod Tartari veterem Hungariam iamp occupaverant et sue ditioni subiecerant.

**Alberic de Trois-Fontaines, Chronica**

*Date:* Between 1232 and 1241

*[Alberic's chronicle, penned progressively from 1232 to 1241, discusses various aspects of the Prester John legend, providing accounts of the* Prester John Letter, *Alexander III's letter, the Fifth Crusade, and giving in particular further details of the conquests of the Mongols in Russia and Eastern Europe. Alberic was the first Christian author who acknowledged the Mongols might be 'neither Christians nor Saracens'. At the end of this excerpt, Alberic changed his mind about associating Prester John with the Mongols, and put forward the idea that the Mongols killed Prester John and took over his domain, an idea that became increasingly popular as an explanation for why the belligerent Mongols were initially thought to be a benevolent Christian kingdom.]*

*In the year 1165*

[…]

And at this time, Prester John, King of the Indians, sent his letters full of astonishing things to diverse kings of Christendom, but especially to Manuel, the emperor of Constantinople, and to Frederick, the emperor of the Romans, out of which letters this was written: 'Prester John, king of kings and lord of lords of the earth, by the power and virtue of God and our lord Jesus Christ, to Emanuel, governor of the Romans, health', and so on. 'Excelling every king of the whole earth in virtue and power; 72 kings are tributaries to us. Because there are many Christians … ', and so on, which continues up to: 'We also have another palace which was made through the revelation [given] to my father who was called Quasi-Deus' [God-like].[1]

*In the year 1170*

[…]

Certain letters of Pope Alexander were found, which he sent to Prester John mentioned above, who was also carefully instructed on the faith and customs of the Holy Roman Church by a certain Bishop Philip ordained by the same pope. This Philip had been sent across to the Roman Pope by the same Prester John.

[…]

*In the year 1220*

After the capture of Damietta, a certain prophecy written in Chaldean letters was found in the temple of the Saracens, which Lord Pelagius, Cardinal-bishop of Albano, and legate to those parts, made to be translated into Latin, and sent to Rome to the lord pope, which a certain Master James, appointed legate to Ireland by the lord pope, carried from Rome to Clairvaux, continuing to Ireland.[2] Many things were present in this astronomical prophecy about the things which came to pass in the promised land, about Nur al-Din,[3] about Saladin, about the capture of Jerusalem [in 1187], about the two kings Philip [II] of France and Richard [I, the Lionheart], of England, who [both] retook Acre [in 1191], about the destruction of Ascalon [in 1187], and about many other things which had now taken place in the promised land, and that in the twenty-ninth year from the retaking of Acre, Damietta would be captured by the Christians, and many things are written there about cardinal Pelagius, which have turned out differently.

Indeed, a prophecy of this sort, although it speaks the truth in certain things, still deceives in many things. It was also written in that prophecy that a certain king would come from the eastern region, who will be called David by name, and that another king would come from the western region who will destroy the land of the Saracens up to Jerusalem, and that in the month of July a war should be made between the Saracens and the Christians near Cairo in Egypt …

*In the year 1221*

Then the highest pontiff Honorius [III] wrote to all the archbishops of France that cardinal Pelagius had written from the overseas regions [i.e. Outremer] that King David, who is called Prester John, a God-fearing man, having passed Persia into his powerful hand and having

subdued the Persian Sultan on the field of battle, invading and occupying his land for 24 days, possesses a great many fortified cities and castles. And he proceeded so far from that region that his army extended for ten days from Baghdad, that most great and famous city, which is said to be the special seat of the caliph, which the Saracens call their highest priest.[4]

In fear of him, the sultan of Aleppo, a relation of the brother sultans of Damascus and Babylon,[5] his strength, which he had prepared against the Christian army, which was staying at Damietta, was driven against the king to completely repulse him; and that same legate Pelagius sent his messengers to Avignia [i.e. Abkhazia], the land of the Georgians, who are Catholic men and powerful in arms, asking and praying that they make war on the Saracens on their own side.

Indeed, in letters which the Templars sent[6] it was read that the same King David acquired a certain kingdom next to Persia in the eastern regions, in which there are 300 cities, not counting the castles and villages, and another kingdom nearby in which there are roughly 300 [cities] along with the castles, 66 flowing rivers, and he divided his army into 40 parts, and he set up 100,000 fighters in each part. And the things that were written there about King David took place in that year; whatsoever [was written] from then on [in the letter] was done in the previous year. It was likewise announced in France in that year that the same King David or his son, as some people say, had now come to Cumania, which is beyond Hungary and in the Russian parts.

There he destroyed certain lands of the unbelievers and especially of the Cumans, and he held the strongest war there for five months; [the letter tells] of the Russians resisting him in the many thousands, likewise of the Prussian pagans who he killed without number; and that the great city of Tornax, that is Ornacia, was destroyed by them, towards which merchants used to come from far-away lands;[7] and it was told that there were in his army 40 kings, 60 archbishops or bishops, and this same King David was delayed around those parts for almost two years; and many other incredible things were said about them, but these few will suffice; indeed some say that they are neither Christians nor Saracens.

*In the year 1222*

The aforesaid King David and his army which the Hungarians and Cumans call the Tartars – and up till now their followers in the overseas parts were known as ‘Tartar’ – when they heard that Damietta had been ruined, they returned through the islands of the sea to their fatherland as much as they were able and all their fame

was scattered and vanished in a short time.

*In the year 1234*

[…]

In the overseas parts, in a time of truce, many people came from remote lands to the sepulchre of the Lord; and there was found to be nine faiths or nine special orders of Christianity, from each of which pilgrims celebrate there at the sepulchre of the Lord with their rite, with priests from each of those orders. The first of these is the order of our Christians, namely the Latins, that is, the Romans, and there are rightly in that order 700 bishoprics, which are responsible to the lord pope specifically. The second is the order of the Greeks and Russians, who, although they differ from each other in certain respects, are nevertheless counted as one order. The third, the order of the Syrians, arose from the origin of Christianity in the overseas parts; these are connected to the Nestorians, who live on in those parts until now. The fourth order is that of the Armenians living on near Antioch and beyond Asia Minor, and the Maronites are counted with them. The fifth is the order of the Georgians and of the Avignian[8] Christians, who inhabit a great land beyond the Armenians; but their clergymen have round crowns; the laypeople have square ones. The sixth order is that of the Jacobites, which Catholic men and the impious Nestorians are said to have arrested from the days of emperor Marcian;[9] these men sign themselves with one finger only and they make the sign of the cross. The seventh order is called that of the Nubian Christians, whose land is most great, and many of them are tributaries to the Saracens. The eighth order contains that whole multitude of Christians which is subject to Prester John. The ninth order is that of the Maronites …

*In the year 1237*

[…]

Indeed, at that time there arose the Tartars, a certain barbarian people under the power of Prester John. When Prester John was in battle against the Medes and Persians, he called them to his aid, and placed them in forts and fortifications; they, seeing they were stronger [than him], killed him and occupied his land for the most part, setting a king above them, as though he was Prester John; and from that time on they did many evils in the land, such that this year they killed 42 bishops in Greater Armenia. Therefore, there was a rumour that this

people of the Tartars wished to come to Cumania and Hungary, but [to find out] whether or not this was true, four Brothers Preachers were sent from Hungary, who travelled for 100 days to Old Hungary. When they returned, they announced that the Tartars had already occupied Old Hungary and placed it at their submission.

**John of Plano Carpini, Ystoria Mongolorum**

*Date:* June, 1247

*Capitulum V*

**9.** Inde [Chingis] est in terram suam reversus, et cum aliquantulum quievisset, convocatis omnibus hominibus suis, contra Kytaos pariter processerunt ad bellum. Et cum diu contra ipsos pugnassent, magnam partem terre Kytaorum vicerunt; imperatorem etiam eorum concluserunt in suam civitatem maiorem, quam tam longo tempore obsederunt quod exercitui omnino defecerunt expense. Et cum non haberent omnino quid manducarent, precepit ille Chingiscan quod de decem hominibus unum darent ad manducandum. Illi autem de civitate pugnabant viriliter contra eos machinis et sagittis; et cum defficerent lapides, pro lapidibus argentum prohiciebant, et maxime argentum liquefactum; civitas enim hec multis divitiis erat plena. Et cum diu pugnassent, et eam bello minime vincere possent, fecerunt unam magnam viam sub terra ab exercitu usque ad medium civitatis, et aperientes subito terram, eis nescientibus, prosilierunt in medium eius et pugnaverunt cum hominibus civitatis eiusdem. Et illi qui erant extra, eodem modo etiam contra eos pugnabant, et concidentes portas intraverunt civitatem, et occidentes imperatorem et homines plures civitatem possiderunt, et aurum et argentum et omnes divicias eius abstulerunt; et cum predicte terre Kytaorum suos homines prefecissent, in terram propriam sunt reversi. Et tunc primo imperatore Kytaorum devicto, factus est predictus Chingiscan imperator. Quamdam tamen partem terre Kytaorum, quia posita erat in mari, usque in hodiernum diem, nullactenus devicerunt.

**10.** Kytai autem, de quibus superius diximus, homines sunt pagani qui habent litteram specialem, et habent novum et vetus testamentum, ut dicitur, et habent vitas patrum et heremitas et domos quasi ecclesias factas, in quibus ipsi orant temporibus suis, et dicunt se quosdam sanctos habere. Unum Deum colunt, dominum Iesum Christum honorant, et credunt vitam eternam; sed minime baptizantur. Scripturam nostram honorant et reverentur, christianos

diligunt et elemosinas faciunt plures. Homines benigni et humani satis esse videntur. Barbam non habent, et in dispositione faciei satis concordant cum Mongalis, non tamen sunt in facie ita lati. Linguam propriam habent. Meliores artifices non inveniuntur in mundo in omnibus operibus, in quibus homines solent exercitari. Terra eorum est opulenta valde in frumento, vino, auro et serico, et omnibus rebus ex quibus solet sustentari humana natura.

**11.** Et cum aliquantulum quievisset, suos exercitus divisit. Unum de filiis suis Tossuc nomine, quem etiam Chan appellabant, id est imperatorem, misit cum exercitu contra Comanos, quos multo bello devicit. Et postquam devicerat eos, in terram suam est reversus.

**12.** Alium etiam filium misit cum exercitu contra Indos; qui minorem Indiam devicit. Hii autem nigri sunt sarraceni, qui Ethiopes nominantur. Hic autem exercitus contra christianos, qui sunt in India maiori, ad pugnam processit. Hoc audiens rex terre illius, qui vulgo Iohannes Presbiter appellatur, venit contra eos exercitu congregato, et faciens ymagines hominum cupreas in sellis posuit super equos, ponens ignem interius, et posuit homines cum follibus post ymagines cupreas super equos, et cum multis ymaginibus talibus et equis taliter preparatis venerunt contra predictos Tartaros ad pugnandum. Et cum ad locum prelii pervenissent, istos equos unum iuxta alium premiserunt, viri autem qui erant retro posuerunt, nescio quid, super ignem, qui erat in predictis ymaginibus, et cum follibus fortiter suflaverunt. Unde factum est quod ex igne greco homines comburebantur et equi, et ex fumo aer est denigratus. Et tunc super Tartaros iecerunt sagittas, ex quibus multi homines vulnerati fuerunt et interfecti, et sic cum confusione eos de suis finibus eiecerunt, nec unquam audivimus quod ultra ad ipsos redierint.

**13.** Cum autem per deserta redirent, in quamdam terram venerunt in qua – ut nobis in curia imperatoris per clericos ruthenos et alios qui diu fuerunt inter ipsos firmiter dicebatur – quedam monstra ymaginem femineam habentia repererunt. Et cum interrogassent eas per multos interpretes, ubi essent viri illius terre, responderunt quod in illa terra quecumque femine nascebantur, habebant formam humanam, masculi autem speciem habebant caninam. Et dum moram protraherent in terra predicta, canes in alia fluvii parte convenerunt in unum, et dum esset yems asperima, se omnes proiecerunt in aquam, et post hoc incontinenti in pulverem volvebantur, et ita pulvis admixtus aque super eos congelebatur. Et dum sepe ita fecissent glacies densa facta est super eos, et cum magno impetu cum Tartaris convenerunt ad pugnam. At illi cum sagittis iactabant super eos, ac si super lapides sagittassent retro sagitte redibant; alia etiam arma eorum in nullo ledere poterant ipsos. Canes vero insultum facientes in eos morsibus vulneraverunt multos et occiderunt, et ita eiecerunt eos de finibus

suis. Et de hoc adhuc est proverbium inter eos: pater tuus vel frater a canibus fuit occisus. Mulieres autem eorum quas ceperant duxerunt in terram eorum, et usque ad diem mortis earum ibidem fuerunt.

## John de Plano Carpini, History of the Mongols

*Date:* June, 1247

*[The rise of the Mongols in the thirteenth century radically altered the European worldview, with Asia becoming a place of geopolitical importance and potential danger. For this reason, European leaders sent a number of travellers to exchange messages with the Mongol khans and perform reconnaissance. The earliest of these was John de Plano Carpini, an Italian sent by Pope Innocent IV in 1245. A plump, elderly man of 65, John endured the gruelling journey to Mongolia carrying the Pope's letter demanding that the Mongol Great Khan Güyük convert to Christianity, only to be rebuffed and sent back to Europe carrying an equally arrogant letter demanding that the Pope bow to Mongol will. Upon return to Europe, John seems to have faced scepticism from his audiences, who disbelieved many of the claims he made about the East; this caused him to revise the text to improve its credibility. Presented below is the text's second redaction, which added some details to the account of Prester John.[10]]*

*Chapter Five*

From there [Dzungaria], [Chingis Khan] returned to his own land, and when he had rested a little, having called together all his men, they proceeded as one to war against the Khitans. And when they had fought against them for a considerable time, they conquered a large part of the land of the Khitans; they also confined their emperor in his chief city, which they besieged for such a long time that the army's supplies completely ran out. And since they had absolutely nothing to eat, that Chingiscan ordered that from [every] ten men they would surrender one to be eaten. But those men from the city fought manfully against them with machines and arrows; and when the stones had run out, they threw silver instead of stones, and especially molten silver; for indeed, this city was full of many riches. And when they had fought for a considerable time, and they were not at all able to conquer the city in battle, they made a great tunnel beneath the earth from the army to the middle of the city, and suddenly uncovering the earth without them knowing, they burst forth into its middle and fought with the men of that city. And those who were outside also fought against them in the same way, and cutting down

the doors, they entered the city, killed the emperor and many men, and seized the city, and they stole gold and silver and all its riches; and when they had put their men in charge of the land of the Khitai, they turned back towards their own land. And then, with the first emperor of the Khitans defeated, the aforesaid Chingiscan was made emperor. However, to this day they have not subdued one part of the land of the Khitans, because it was located in the sea.

But the Khitans, about whom we have spoken above, are pagan men who have a special script, and they have the new and old testament, so it is said, and they have the lives of the fathers and hermits and houses fashioned like churches, in which they pray for their times, and they say that they have saints. They worship one God, they respect the Lord Jesus Christ, and they believe in eternal life; but they are rarely baptised. They respect and revere our scripture, they love Christians, and they make many religious donations. They seem to be kind and humane enough men. They do not have beards, and they are similar enough to the Mongols in the layout of their face, however their faces are not so wide. They have their own language. Better artisans in all the products in which these men are accustomed to train are not found [anywhere] in the world. Their land is very rich in grain, wine, gold, and silk, and in all things from which mankind is usually sustained.

And when he [i.e. Chingiscan] had rested a little, he divided his army. With one army, he sent one of his sons, Tossuc by name [Tolui? Jochi?], who they also called Chan, that is 'emperor', against the Cumans, who they subdued in a great battle. And after he had subdued them, he returned to his own land.

[Chingiscan] also sent another of his sons with an army against the Indies; he captured Lesser India. These men are black Saracens, who are called Ethiopians. But this army proceeded to fight against the Christians who are in Greater India. Hearing this, the king of that land, who is commonly called Prester John, having gathered an army, came against them, and, making copper images of men, he put them in saddles upon horses, placing a fire within, and he put men with bellows behind the copper images on the horses, and with many such images and horses prepared in this way, they came against the aforesaid Tartars to fight them.

And when they had arrived at the place of battle, they sent these horses forward in a line, but the men who were behind them placed I know not what upon the fire which was in the aforesaid images, and with their bellows, they blew them forcefully. This caused men and horses to be consumed by the Greek fire, and the air was made black from the smoke. And then they shot arrows upon the Tartars, from which many men had been wounded and killed, and in this way, with

such confusion, they repelled them from their borders, nor have we ever heard that they returned to them again.

But when they returned through the desert, they came upon a certain land in which – as was firmly told to us in the Emperor's court by Russian clerics and others who had been amongst them for a considerable time – they found certain monsters possessing the image of a woman. And when they asked them through many interpreters where the men of that land were, they replied that whatever females were born had human form, and that the men had the appearance of dogs. And while they prolonged their stay in the aforesaid land, the dogs in another part of the river came together into one and while it was the most bitter winter, they all threw themselves into the water, and after this change of temperature, they roll in the sand, and in this way the sand mixed with water becomes frozen upon them.

And often when they do this, thick ice is made upon them, and with great fury they come together to fight with the Tartars. And when these men shoot them with their arrows, it is as if they had shot against stones, the arrows bounce straight back off. There is also no way that their other weapons can harm them. Truly, the dogs, making assault against them, wound and kill many with bites, and in this way they repel them from their borders. And on account of this there is now a saying amongst them: 'Your father or brother was killed by dogs'. But whoever they capture of their wives they led back to their land, and they remain there to the day of their death.

**Simon of St Quentin, Historia Tartarorum**

*Date:* Late 1240s (?)

*XXX, 69 – De interfectione David Indie regis a Tartaris.*

Anno Domini M°.CC°.II°., secundum quosdam, Tartari post occisionem domini sui exierunt in populorum destructionem. Hi etenim prius adhuc in terra sua, videlicet Tartaria, que affinis est Indie, residentes, contra regem David dominum suum, videlicet presbyteri Johannis quondam dominatoris et imperatoris Indie filium, conspiraverunt eumque dolose machinando interfecerunt. Antea siquidem ab antiquo Tartaria Indie regi fuerat subjecta eique pacifice et quiete debita usque ad tempus illud exolverat tributa. Cumque predictus rex ab eis tributum solitum expeteret, precipiens insuper ut in armis vel in angaria aliqua deservirent, illi super aggravacionem manus domini sui conquerentes inierunt pluries consilium utrum ei simpliciter obedirent an ei prout possent obviarent. Tandem unus

eorum nomine Cingischam, qui sagatior et antiquior videbatur, dedit consilium ut mandato regis contradicerent et omnes unanimiter in eum exurgerent eumque ac suos quos invenire possent occiderent. ‘Ad execucionem autem, inquit, tanti facti oportet ut omnes in unum et unanimiter congregemur, et unus de quinque qui super alios quatuor ex omnibus quinariis eligatur qui quaternio nuncupetur ejusque precepto in omnibus obediatur ab illis et qui non obedierit occidatur. Similiter eciam super novem sit decimus, et super .xix. xx$^{us}$, et sic usque ad mille et eciam usque ad milies milia, denique usque ad infinitum ascendendo. Tandem unus omnes superexcellens tanquam dominus et cam, id est imperator vel rex, habeatur, cui omnes usque ad mortem per omnia obedire teneantur’. Omnes autem consilium hoc concorditer approbantes ipsum in dominum sibi cum successoribus suis elegerunt, eisque predictam obedientiam in perpetuum se servaturos promiserunt et usque hodie servaverunt. Hic igitur electus altera die convocatis omnibus in montem altum ascendit eosque exhortans ait: ‘ Scitis quod usque nunc tria in nobis peccata semper inundaverunt, videlicet mendacium, furtum et adulterium. Nunc ergo ne vindicante Deo in execucione hujus facti vel alias in posterum impediamur decetero nos omnes a predictis abstinere ipsi promittamus ita quod si quis in aliquo eorum prolapsus inveniatur sine ulla misericordia occidatur’. Quod cum omnes se observaturos in perpetuum promisissent, licetjam iniquitas mentita sit sibi, precepit omnes illos in armis paratos congregari eosque in duabus aciebus divisos una die a duabus partibus equaliter a medio terre distantibus terram domini sui David ingredi ac velociter eam percurrentes nulli parcere sexui vel etati. Illi ergo causa servitutis excuciende triumphique obtinendi quamplurimum animati de terra sua exeuntes arcubus et sagittis clavisque sive fustibus tanquam armis suis potioribus premuniti, quorum maxima pars erant pedites, minor in bobus equitantes, minima vero in asinis et jumentis ac pullis equorum considentes domini sui terram simul a duabus partibus invaserunt eamque totaliter infusione sanguinis intinxerunt. Rex autem David adventum eorum audiens improvise nec ullatenus valens resistere, cum ab una parte exercitus effugere vellet, ab altera preventus est et oppressus, tandemque cum tota familia sua preter unicam filiam menbratim detruncatus, quam videlicet filiam superstitem predictus Cingiscam sibi uxorem accepit et de ea, ut dicitur, filios generavit.

*XXX, 70 – De Rabbanata monacho nestorino.*

Rabbanata vero monachus christianus sed tamen nestorinus, quia vivente David rege fuerat ei familiaris et fortasse quandoque consiliarius, post mortem ipsius David a filia ejus uxore Cingiscam

tandem est evocatus et eidem occasione antique patris sui amicicie et quia christianus erat consiliarius ac penitenciarius ejus factus est, Tartarisque familiaris est effectus, ipsa tamen dumtaxat vivente, Cingiscam permittente. At illa mortua factus est idem monachus Tartaris extraneus et ab eis elongatus. Ipse tamen Rabbanata, tum mediante regis David filia, tum eciam mediante curie frequentia, multa de consiliis et factis Tartarorum noverat multaque divinando eisdem revelabat. Propter que nimirum ad tempus ab ipsis est magnus arbitratus et ab illis qui curiam Cingiscam et baronum ejus frequentabant sanctus est reputatus.

[…]

*XXX, 87– De nationibus quas Tartaripost necem domini sui subjugarunt.*

Rege itaque David cum omnibus suis necato, ut predictum est, a Tartaris, Cingiscam ceterique Tartari de perpetratis supra modum gloriantes flagiciis, in tantam amentie exarserunt superbiam ut instigante dyabolo conciperent animo sicut domini sui terram, ita totum paulatim mundum suo subjugare dominio. Animati namque super obtenta victoria de Indis, Deo permittente regisque David et populi sui exigentibus peccatis, juvenibus fortibus ac bellicosis viris secum retentis et in servitutem suam redactis, circumadjacentes regiones ceperunt paulatim invadere et expugnare, tandemque suo dominio penitus subjugare. Sicque qui a principia pauperes et abjecti sclavi et tributarii terram regis Indie invaserunt, superordinante Dei judicio multorumque populorum peccatis exigentibus, in auro, argento et possessionibus animalium ac multitudine servientium divites facti, ac fere super omnia colla orientalium nacionum domini effecti sunt. Siquidem nulli hominum cedentes a Tartaria fere usque ad ortum solis et ab ortu solis usque ad mare Mediterraneum dilatati sunt et innumerabilia regna suo dominio subjecerunt. In omnibus autem terris que ab eis destruuntur statim fames valida sequitur, sicut postea per exempla manifestabitur.

**Simon of St Quentin, History of the Tartars**

*Date:* Late 1240s (?)

*[Like John de Plano Carpini, Simon of St Quentin was a missionary sent by Pope Innocent IV to convert the Mongols. The Mongol Khan, Baiju, was greatly offended at the proposition, and demanded that the Pope come to Mongolia and submit to him as emperor of the entire Earth. The Great*

*Khan ordered the execution of Simon and his fellow missionaries three times, but Mongol reverence towards religious personnel seems to have saved them. In this account, Simon attempted to besmirch the moral character of the Mongols by alleging that they had killed their lord King David, son of Prester John. Simon's account is only preserved in the encyclopedia of Vincent of Beauvais, from which it is excerpted below.]*

*Book 30, Chapter 69 – On the killing of David, King of India, by the Tartars*

In the year of the Lord 1202, according to some, the Tartars, after killing their lord, departed to destroy peoples. Indeed, these men lived up till then in their own land, namely Tartaria, which is next to India, and they conspired against their lord King David, namely the son of once lord and emperor of India, Prester John, and, cunningly plotting [against him], they killed him.[11] Accordingly, before this, from ancient times, Tartaria was subject to the King of India, and up till that time calmly and peacefully paid him the tribute that was due. When the aforesaid king asked for the customary tribute from them, he also ordered that some of them submit themselves to compulsory service, either in the armies or in work; they began complaining at this offence from the hand of their lord, and [took] counsel whether to simply obey him or to withstand him as much as possible.

However, one of them by the name of Chingis Khan, who seemed more sagacious and venerable, gave counsel that they oppose their king's order, and they all unanimously rose against him [David] and killed him and whoever they could find of his men. 'As for the carrying out of such a task', he said, 'we must all gather together as one, and, within each group of five men, one out of the five must be placed above the other four, and the four must consider him as their leader and obey him in all things, and whoever does not obey him will be killed. Also, in the same way, the tenth man will be superior to the nine, and the twentieth man will be superior to the nineteen, and so on up to 1,000 and also up to a million, then ascending up to infinity. However, one man stands above all of them, holding the position of lord or khan, that is, emperor or king. All men are required to be obedient to him in all things until the day of their death'.[12] Everyone approved of this counsel harmoniously, and they chose him and his successors to be their lords, and they promised that they would forever serve them in everlasting obedience, and they serve them up to this day.

Then, once this man was elected, the next day, with everyone gathered on a high mountain, he ascended and, inciting them, he said: 'You should know that up to now three sins have always overflown us,

namely lying, theft, and adultery. Therefore, so that we are not impeded by God's punishment in execution of such a deed, now or at other times in the future, let us all henceforth promise to abstain from the aforesaid things, and so if anyone is found relapsed into such an act, he will be killed without any mercy'. They all promised this for all time, with everyone watching them, although now the evil of lying is lawful to them.

One day, he undertook to bring all of them together arrayed in their arms and divided into two groups, with each of the two groups equally distant from the middle of the land, they entered the land of their lord David and, swiftly running around, none of them refrained from sex or pleasure. Then, roused by the possibility of shaking off their servitude and obtaining triumph, with a huge number of them departing their own land with bows and arrows and clubs or staffs, strengthened by their more powerful weapons, as it were, with the greatest part of them being footsoldiers, the lesser part riding on cattle, and the least part sitting on donkeys and mules and foals, they invaded the land of their lord simultaneously from two directions and completely saturated it with an effusion of blood. But King David, hearing of their unexpected coming, and being in no way strong enough to resist them, when he tried to flee from one section of the army, he was prevented and besieged by the other, and at length he was cut to pieces limb by limb, along with his whole family except for one daughter, namely the surviving daughter which Chingis Khan took to wife, and from whom, so it is said, he produced sons.[13]

*Book 30, Chapter 70 – On Rabbanata the Nestorian Monk*[14]

Rabbanata was a Christian monk, but however a Nestorian. He was King David's familiar when he was alive and perhaps his counsellor at some point. After the death of this King David, he was summoned by David's daughter, the wife of Chingis Khan, and on that same pretext of his friendship with her father long ago, and because he was a Christian, he was made her counsellor and confessor and he was made familiar to the Tartars, with him being in such a position only for as long as she was alive, with the permission of Chingis Khan. But when she died, the monk [Rabbanata] was made foreign to the Tartars and withdrew from them. However, this Rabbanata, when he was involved with the daughter of King David, he was involved with the full court, and he had learned many things about the counsels and acts of the Tartars and he showed them many things by divination. On account of this, without doubt, he was at that time held to be a great choice, and he was seen as a saint by those who frequented the court of Chingis Khan and his barons.

[…]

*Book 30, Chapter 87 – On the nations which the Tartars subdued after the murder of their lord*

And so, after King David, with all his men, had been killed by the Tartars, as has been discussed earlier, Chingis Khan and the other Tartars, boasting about these shameful acts perpetrated in the above manner, they raged with madness to such a state of pride that, by the Devil's instigation, they conceived in their minds to subjugate the whole world little by little to their dominion, as they had done to the land of their lord. For, roused by the victories they had obtained over the Indies, with God's permission, the sins of King David and his people driving it, they kept the strong and warlike young men with them and reduced them to servitude, and began little by little to invade and conquer the surrounding regions, and eventually to completely subject them to his dominion. And thus, men who were initially poor and abject slaves and tributaries invaded the land of the King of India, with God's judgement arranging it on high, and with the sins of many people driving it, they were made rich in gold, silver, and in possessions of animals and a multitude of servants, and they were made lords over almost every neck of the oriental nations. Accordingly, no group of men have ever been dispersed as much as these, extending from Tartaria almost to the rising of the sun and from the rising of the sun to the Mediterranean Sea, and they have subjected innumerable kingdoms to their dominion. Also, in all those lands that have been destroyed by them, immediately a bitter famine has followed, as will be shown later with examples.

**William of Rubruck, Itinerarium**

*Date:* 1253–55

*Capitulum XVII – Quod Sartah et Gagucham et Keucham faciunt reverenciam christianis.*

**1.** Tempore quo Franci ceperunt Anthiochiam [i.e. 1098], tenebat monarchiam in illis lateribus aquilonis quidam qui vocabatur Coirchan. Coir est proprium nomen, chan nomen dignitatis, quod idem est quod divinator. Omnes enim divinatores vocant Chan. Unde principes dicuntur Chan, quia penes eos spectat regimen populi per divinationem. Unde legitur in hystoriam Antiochie quod Turci miserunt pro succursu contra Francos ad regem Coirchan.

De illis enim partibus venerunt omnes Turci. Iste Coir erat Caracatai. Cara idem est quod nigrum, Catai nomen gentis, unde Caracatai idem est quod niger Catai. Et hoc dicunt ad differentiam ipsorum Catai, qui sunt in oriente super occeanum de quibus postea dicam vobis. Isti Caracathai erant in quibusdam alpibus per quas transivi.

**2.** Et in quadam planicie inter illas alpes erat quidam nestorinus, pastor potens et dominus super populum qui dicebatur Naiman, qui erat christiani nestorini. Mortuo Coirchan, elevavit se ille nestorinus in regem et vocabant eum nestoriani regem Iohannem, et plus dicebant de ipso in decuplo quam veritas esset. Ita enim faciunt nestoriani venientes de partibus illis, de nichilo enim faciunt magnos rumores. Unde disseminaverunt de Sartach quod esset christianus et de Manguchan et de Keuchan, quia faciunt maiorem reverentiam christianis quam aliis populis. Et tamen in veritate christiani non sunt. Sic ergo exivit magna fama de illo rege Iohanne. Et ego transivi per pascua eius, nullus aliquid sciebat de eo, nisi nestoriani pauci. In pascuis eius habitabat Keuchan, apud cuius curiam fuit frater Andreas, et ego etiam transivi per eam in reditu.

**3.** Huic Iohanni erat frater quidam, potens pastor similiter, nomine Unc; et ipse erat ultra alpes ipsorum Caracatai distans a fratre suo spacio trium ebdomadarum, et erat dominus cuiusdam villule que dicitur Caracarum, populum habens sub se qui dicebantur Crit et Merkit, qui erant christiani nestorini. Sed ipse dominus eorum, dimisso cultu Christi, sectabatur idola, habens secum sacerdotes ydolorum; qui omnes sunt invocatores demonum et sortilegi.

**4.** Ultra pascua istius, ad IX vel XV dietas, erant pascua Moal, qui erant pauperrimi homines sine capitaneo et sine lege, exceptis sortilegiis et divinationibus, quibus omnes in partibus illis intendunt. Et iuxta Moal erant alii pauperes, qui dicebantur Tartari. Rex Iohannes mortuus fuit sine herede, et ditatus est frater eius Unc, et faciebat se vocari Chan, et mittebantur armenta et greges eius usque ad terminos Moal. Tunc temporis erat Chingis, faber quidam in populo Moal, et furabatur de animalibus Uncchan quod poterat, in tantum quod conquesti sunt pastores Unc domino suo. Tunc congregavit exercitum et equitavit in terram Moal querens ipsum Chingis, et ille fugit inter Tartaros et latuit ibi. Tunc ipse Unc, accepta preda a Moal et a Tartaris, reversus est.

**5.** Tunc ipse Chingis alloqutus est ipsos Tartaros et ipsos Moal dicens: ‘Quia sine duce sumus, opprimunt nos vicini nostri’. Et fecerunt eum ducem et capitaneum Tartari et Moal. Tunc latenter congregato exercitu irruit super ipsum Unc et vicit eum, et ille fugit in Cathaiam. Ibi capta fuit filia eius, quam Chingis dedit uni ex filiis suis in uxorem, ex quo ipsa suscepit istum qui nunc regnat Mangu.

**6.** Tunc ipse Chingis premittebat ubique ipsos Tartaros; et inde exivit nomen eorum, quia ubique clamabatur: 'Ecce Tartari veniunt'. Sed per crebra bella modo omnes fere deleti sunt. Unde isti Moal modo volunt extinguere nomen illud et suum elevare. Terra illa in qua primo fuerunt et ubi est adhuc curia Chingischan, vocatur Onankerule. Sed quia Caracaron est regio circa quam fuit prima acquisitio eorum, illam civitatem habent pro regali et ibi prope eligunt suum Chan.

[…]

*Capitulum XXVI – De diversis nacionibus, et de illis qui comedere solebant parentes.*

**1.** Predicti ergo Iugures qui sunt mixti cum christianis et sarracenis, per frequentes disputaciones, ut credo, pervenerunt ad hoc quod non credunt nisi unum Deum. Et isti fuerunt habitantes in civitatibus qui primo obedierunt Chringischan; unde ipse dedit regi eorum filiam suam. Et ipsa Caracarum est quasi in territorio eorum, et tota terra Regis sive Presbiteri Iohannis et Unc fratris eius est circa terras eorum. Sed isti in pascuis ad aquilonem, illi Iugures inter montes ad meridiem. Inde est quod ipsi Moal sumpserunt litteras eorum, et ipsi sunt magni scriptores eorum, et omnes fere nestorini sciunt litteras eorum.

**2.** Post istos sunt ipsi Tangut ad orientem inter montes illos, homines fortissimi, qui ceperunt Chingis in bello, et pace facta dimissus ab eis, postea subiugavit eos. Isti habent boves fortissimos habentes caudas plenas pilis sicut equi, et ventres pilosos et dorsa; bassiores sunt aliis bobus in tibiis, sed fortiores multum. Isti trahunt magnas domos Moallorum et habent cornua gracilia, longa, arcuosa, acutissima, ita quod oportet semper summitates eorum secare. Vacca non permittit se iniungi nisi cantetur ei. Habent etiam naturam bubali, quia si vident hominem indutum rubies, insiliunt in eum, volentes interficere.

[…]

**5.** Post hoc intravimus planiciem illam in qua erat curia Keuchan, que solebat esse terra Naiman qui erant proprii homines ipsius Presbiteri Iohannis. Sed tunc non vidi illam curiam sed in reditu.

**William of Rubruck, Itinerary**

*Date:* 1253–55

*[Of all the European travellers who visited the Mongol court, William of Rubruck, who was sent by King Louis IX of France to evangelise the Mongols in the 1250s, is the most highly regarded for his objectivity, detailed description, and anthropological approach to describing the various Asian cultures he came into contact with. He is the first extant writer to openly doubt the famous Prester John (except perhaps Otto of Freising), but William did not argue that he never existed at all, only that his reputation for power and riches was undeserved.]*

*Chapter 17 – How Sartah and Gagucham and Keucham made reverence to the Christians.*

At the time when the Franks captured Antioch [i.e. 1098], a certain man called Coirchan [i.e. gürkhan] held the monarchy in those northern parts. Coir is his own name, Chan the name of his title, which is the same as 'diviner'. Indeed, they call all diviners 'Chan'.[15] For that reason, the princes are called Chan, because control of the people belongs to them through divination. For that reason, it is read in the *History of Antioch* that the Turks sent Coirchan to the King [of Antioch] for aid against the Franks.[16]

Indeed, all the Turks come from those parts. This Coir was of the Caracatai [i.e. Kara-Khitai]. Cara is the same as 'black', Catai the name of the race, therefore Caracatai is the same as 'Black Khitai'. And they call them this to differentiate them from the other Khitai who live in the east next to the ocean, about whom I will tell you more later. These Caracatai [Kara-Khitai] lived in certain mountains through which I passed.

And in a certain plain between these mountains there was a certain Nestorian, a powerful shepherd and lord over a people called Naiman, which was a Nestorian Christian people. When Coirchan died, this Nestorian raised himself to the kingship and the Nestorians called him King John, and they used to say ten times more about him than was the truth. For in this way the Nestorians who come from those parts make great rumours from nothing.

For this reason, they alleged that Sartach was Christian, and [the same] of Manguchan [i.e. Möngke] and of Keuchan [i.e. Güyük], because they have greater respect for Christians than for other peoples.[17] But in truth they are not Christians. In this way, the great rumour of King John spread.

And [when] I crossed through his fields, no one knew anything about him, except for a few Nestorians. In his fields lived Keuchan, whose court brother Andreas[18] was attached to, and I also crossed through that on [my] return.

There was a certain brother to this John by the name of Unc,[19]

also a powerful shepherd, and he lived beyond the mountains of those Kara-Khitai, distant from his brother by a space of three weeks, and he was lord of a certain little village which is called Karakorum, and with a people under him who are called Crit [i.e. Kereit] and Merkit, who were Nestorian Christians. But this lord of theirs, having abandoned the worship of Christ, followed idols, keeping priests of idols with him, all of whom call upon demons and soothsayers.

Beyond his pastures, nine or fifteen days' distant, were the pastures of the Moals [i.e. Mongols], who were very poor men, without leader and without faith, with the exception of the soothsayers and diviners, upon whom everyone in those parts relies. And next to Moal, there were other poor people who were called Tartars. King John died without an heir and his brother Unc was made rich, and he made himself to be called Chan, and his cattle and herds were sent to the boundaries of Moal.

At that time lived Chingis, a certain worker of the Moal people, and he stole what he could of Uncchan's animals in such measure that the shepherds complained to their lord Unc. Then he brought together an army and rode to the land of Moal complaining of that Chingis, and he [Chingis] fled amongst the Tartars and hid there. Then Unc, having taking plunder from the Moal and from the Tartars, turned back.

Then that Chingis addressed those Tartars and those Moal, saying: 'Because we are without a duke, our neighbours overwhelm us'. And the Tartars and Moals made him duke and captain. Then, gathering an army in secret, he made an attack against that Unc and defeated him, and he [Unc] fled to Cathay. His daughter was captured there, and Chingis gave her to one of his sons as wife, from which [union] she received he who now reigns, Mangu [i.e. Möngke].[20]

Then Chingis sent forth those Tartars everywhere; and for that reason their name spread, because everywhere it was cried out: 'Look out! The Tartars are coming!' But recently almost everyone was obliterated through repeated battles. From there, these Moals recently wished to extinguish that name and raise their own. That land in which they first lived, and where the court of Chingis Khan is to this day, is called Onankerule.[21] But because Karakorum is the region around which their first acquisition was, they reserve that city for their royalty, and they elected their Chan near there.

[…]

*Chapter Twenty Six – On various nations, and on those who are accustomed to eat their parents.*

Now, the aforesaid Iugures [i.e. Uighurs], who are a mixture of

Christians and Saracens, through numerous discussions, so I believe, have reached the stage where they only believe in one God. And these men lived in the cities that first submitted to Chingis Khan; whereupon he gave his daughter to their king.[22] And this Karakorum is as it were in their territory, and the whole land of King or Prester John, and Unc his brother, is around their lands. But they [are] in the pastures to the north, [and] the Uighurs [are] between the mountains to the south. It is from these men that the Moals took their letters, and these men are their great writers, and almost all Nestorians know their letters.

After these men are the Tangut between those mountains to the east, very strong men who captured Chingis in battle, and when peace was made he was dismissed by them; afterwards he subdued them. These men have the strongest oxes, with tails full of hair like horses, and hairy bellies and backs; they are lower than other bulls in their shins, but much stronger.

These oxen carry the great houses of the Mongols and they have long, thin, arching horns that are most sharp, so that it is always necessary to cut the tops off them. The cow does not allow itself to be ridden unless it is sung to. They also have the nature of an antelope, because if they see men dressed in red, they spring at them hoping to kill them.

[…]

After this we entered that plain in which was the court of Keuchan, which used to be the land of the Naiman, who were Prester John's own men. But at that time I did not see that court, but on [my] return, [I did].

**Roger Bacon, Opus Majus**

*Date:* 1267

Et extenditur hic principatus ab Ethilia usque in Cathaiam nigram, unde vocatur Caracathaia. Et Cara idem est quod nigra; et dicitur Cathaia nigra ad differentiam alterius Cathaiae, quae est longe ultra hanc ad orientem multis regionibus distantem ab ista Cathaia nigra; de qua postea dicetur. Et haec terra cum sibi adjacentibus est terra imperatoris Tartarorum praecipua, in quibus vagatur semper cum curia sua, ascendendo in aestate ad frigidas regiones, et in hyeme ad calidas. Et haec Cathaia nigra fuit terra Presbyteri Johannis, sive regis Johannis, de quo tanta fama solebat esse, et multa falsa dicta sunt et

scripta.

Hic vero oportet exprimi originem Tartarorum, non solum propter evidentiam distinctionis regionum majorem, sed propter ipsam gentem, quae nunc famosissima est, et subdit mundum pedibus suis. Sciendum igitur est, quod quando bellum fuit Antiochiae tunc regnavit in terra ista Coir Cham. Nam in historia Antiochena legitur, quod Turci miserunt pro succursu contra Francos ad regnum Coir Cham, qui tenebat monarchiam in regionibus aquilonis tempore illo quo capta fuit Antiochia, qui fuit de Caracathaia. Coir vero est nomen proprium, et Cham est nomen dignitatis, et sonat idem quod divinator. Nam principes ibi regunt populum per divinationes et scientias quae instruunt homines in futuris, sive sint partes philosophiae, ut astronomia et scientia experimentalis sive artes magicae, quibus totum oriens est deditum et imbutum.

Omnes igitur imperatores Tartarorum vocantur Cham, sicut apud nos vocantur imperatores et reges. Mortuo vero isto Coir, fuit quidam pastor Nestorinus in terra illa potens et dominus super populum, qui populus vocatur Naiman, qui erant Christiani Nestorini, qui sunt mali Christiani, et tamen dicunt se esse subjectos Romanae ecclesiae. Et isti Nestorini non solum sunt ibi in terra Naiman, sed per omnes regiones usque in orientem sunt dispersi. Iste vero pastor erexit se in regem, et vocatus est Presbyter et Rex Johannes. Huic Johanni erat frater quidam pastor potens, nomine Unc, habens sua pascua ultra fratrem suum per item trium septimanarum, et erat dominus cujusdam villae, quae dicitur Caracarum, quae est nunc civitas imperialis, et major in terra imperatoris, et tamen non est ita bona, sicut sanctus Dionysius juxta Parisius in Francia, sicut scripsit frater Willielmus domino regi. Et ultra pascua illius circiter duodecim dietas erant pascua Moal, qui erant pauperes homines et stulti ac simplices sine lege. Juxta quos fuerunt alii pauperes, qui vocabantur Tartari, similes eis. Mortuo igitur Johanne rege elevavit se in regem Unc frater ejus, et vocavit se Cham, unde Unc Cham dicebatur qui misit armenta sua versus terminos Moal.

**Roger Bacon, The Greater Work**

*Date:* 1267

*[Roger Bacon is often regarded as one of the foremost scientific thinkers of the Middle Ages. His* Opus Majus *contains not only mathematics, astronomy, alchemy, and optics, but also a little-known discussion of Prester John. Bacon had gathered his information through conversations with the previous source, William of Rubruck, who had recently returned*

*from his mission to Asia. As such, Roger echoes William's opinions to a large extent, including his doubts about Prester John. As with William, Roger did not reject Prester John entirely, but only his reputation for power and prestige.]*

And this principate extends from Ethilia[23] to Black Cathay, whence it is called Caracathaia [Kara-Khitai]. And Cara is the same as black, and it is called Black Cathay to differentiate it from the other Cathay that is far beyond it towards the east, many regions distant from that Black Cathay, which will be described later on. And this land, along with the lands adjacent to it, is a special land of the emperor of the Tartars; he always roams around in it with his court, ascending in summer to the cold regions, and in winter [descending] to the hot. And this Black Cathay was the land of Prester John, or King John, about whom there was accustomed to be such a great rumour, and [about whom] many false things have been written and said.

Truly, it is necessary to discuss the origin of the Tartars, not only because there is great evidence for these regions' distinction, but because of that people which is now most famous, which is placing the whole world at its feet. It therefore must be known that Coir Cham[24] reigned in that land at that time when there was war in Antioch [1097–98]. For it is read in the *History of Antioch*[25] that the Turks sent for aid against the Franks to the kingdom of Coir Cham, who was of the Caracathai [Kara-Khitai], who held the monarchy in the northern regions at the time when Antioch was captured. In truth, Coir is his own name, and Cham the name of his rank, and it denotes the same as 'prophet'.[26] For the princes there rule the people through divination and the sciences which teach men about the future, whether they be partly philosophies, such as astronomy and experimental science, or the magical arts, by which everything that arises is delivered and initiated.

All the emperors of the Tartars are called Khan, just as they are called kings and emperors with us. At the death of that Coir, there was a certain powerful Nestorian shepherd in that land who was lord over a people which is called Naiman, who were Nestorian Christians, who are wicked Christians, and yet count themselves as subjects to the Roman church. And these Nestorians are not only there in the land of the Naiman, but they are dispersed throughout all the regions into the Orient. Truly, this pastor raised himself to the kingship, and was called Prester or King John. There was a brother to this King John, a certain powerful shepherd by the name of Unc,[27] who had his pastures beyond his brother's at a space of three weeks' journey away, and he was lord of a certain village which is called Caracarum [Karakorum], which is now the imperial city, and a major city in the emperor's land,

and yet it is not as noble as St Denis next to Paris in France, as brother William [of Rubruck] has written to the lord king [i.e. Louis IX of France].[28] And about twelve days beyond his pastures were the pastures of the Mongols, who were poor and stupid men, simple and without faith. Next to them were other poor men who were called the Tartars, similar to them. With the death of King John, then, his brother Unc raised himself to the kingship and called himself Khan, whence he is called Unc Khan, and he sent his herds towards the borders of Mongolia.

**Bar Hebraeus, Chronicon Syriacum**

*Date:* Before 1286

*De initio regni Mongolorum, qui Tatari sunt.*

Regio primo Tatarorum, priusquam ad regiones externas dilatata erat, fuit vallis quaedam, id est planities magna in parte orienteseptentrionali orbis, longa lataque itinere octo mensium.

[…]

Hoc anno, id est, anno Graecorum 1514, Arabum 599, [1221 A.D.] quum Unach Chan, qui idem est cum Iohanne rege Christiano, imperaret genti cuidam Hunnorum barbarorum quae vocatur Cherith, Cinghis Chanus constanter in eius famulitio fuit. Quum eius praestantiam alacritatemque ei serviendi quotidie videret, invidit ei, et insidiose eum prehendere et interficere voluit. Has insidias duo pueri Unach Chani sentientes Cinghiso indicarunt. Statim Cinghisus certiorem fecit socios suos, qui noctu ex tentoriis progressi se in insidiis occultarunt. Mane Unach Chanus tentoria Tartarorum aggressus neminem ibi invenit. Tum insiluit in eum Cinghis et iuxta fontem, qui appellatur Balschuiah, praelio commisso superior evasit Cinghisus et fusus est Unach Chanus. Postea aliquoties praelio iterum conseruerunt, donec res Unach Chani funditus eversae sunt, ipse interfectus est et mulieries, filii et filiae eius in captivitatem abductae sunt …

Noscere par est, non temere reiectum esse regem Iohannem Cheritaeum, sed postquam cor suum a timore Christi domini sui, qui eum exaltaverat, alienaverat, uxoremque ex populo, qui ad gentes Sinicas pertinet, et Karachata appellatur, duxerat. Quia, posthabito timore patrum suorum, Deos alienos coluit, Deus ei regnum demit, atque homini eo meliori, quique animo integro in Deum affectus erat,

dedit.

**Bar Hebraeus, The Syriac Chronicle**

*Date:* Before 1286

*[Bar Hebraeus, a thirteenth-century catholicos (bishop) of the Syriac Orthodox Church who lived in what is now Turkey, is unique in being the only non-European to write of Prester John, although the Latin sources show that eastern Christians were often discussing Prester John as well. The story Bar Hebraeus tells here is similar in essence to many other treatments in that it tells the familiar story of how Chingis Khan, a subordinate to Prester John, subsequently came to power and overthrew his former lord.]*

*On the beginning of the kingdom of the Mongols, who are the Tartars.*

The first region of the Tartars, before they expanded into foreign regions, was a certain valley, that is, a great plain in the north-eastern part of the world, with a length and breadth of eight months' journey.

[…]

This year, that is, in the year of the Greeks 1514, the Arabic year 599, [i.e. 1202 A.D.], when Unach Khan[29], who is the same as the Christian King John, ruled over a certain tribe of the barbarous Huns which is called Kereit. Chingis Khan was constantly in his servitude. When he saw his presence and eagerness to serve him every day, he begrudged him, and he treacherously desired to capture him and kill him. The two sons of Unach Khan, sensing these treacheries, revealed them to Chingis. Chingis immediately informed his friends, who came out of their tents by night and hid themselves in ambush. In the morning, Unach Khan attacked the tents of the Tartars, but found no one there. Then Chingis leapt upon him and, joining battle next to the spring called Balschuiah [?], the superior Chingis escaped and Unach Khan was routed. Afterwards, they engaged in battle again several times, until the armies of Unach Khan were completely destroyed, he himself was killed and his women, sons, and daughters were taken into captivity …

It is proper to know that King John of the Kereits was not rashly rejected, but afterwards his heart was estranged from fear of Christ, his lord, who he praises, and he took to wife one of the people which pertains to the Chinese peoples, and which is called Karachata [Kara-

Khitai]. Because, being subordinate to the fear of his fathers, he worshipped foreign gods, God took his power away from him, and gave it to a better man than him, who was moved to God with a pure soul.

**Marco Polo, Livres des merveilles du monde**

*Date:* 1298–99 (?)

Il fui voir que les Tartars demoroient en tramontaine entor Ciorcia; et en cel contree es[toit] grant plaignes que ne avoit abitasion com de cités et de caustiaus, mes il hi avoit b[u]en pascor et grant flumes et aigues assez. Il ne avoient seignors, mes bien est il voir qu'il fasoient rente a u[n] grant sire que estoit appellés en lor lengajes Unc Can, que vaut a dir en françois le grant sire – et ce fu le Prestre Johan de cui tout le monde en parolent de sa grant segnorie. Les Tartars les donoient rente d'ogne X bestes le une. Or avint que il multiplient mout. Et quant Prestre Johan vit qu'il estoient si grant jent, il dit qu'il li poroient nuire et dit qu'il les partira por plosor contree. Et adonc hi envoie de sez baron por ce faire. Et quant les Tartars oirent ce que Prestre Johan voloit lor faire, il en furent dulens. Il se partirent tuit ensemble et alent por desert leus ver tramontaine tant que Prestre Johan ne poit lor nuire. Et estoient revel a lui et ne li fasoient nulle rente. Et ensi demorent auques de tens.

*LXV – Comant cinghis fu le primer kaan des Tartars.*

Or avint que a les MCLXXXVII anz [de l'ancarnasion de Crist] les Tartars font un lor roi que avoit a nom en lor lengajes Cinghis Can. Cestui fui home de grant valor et de gran senz et de grant proesse. Et si vos di que quant cestui fu esleu a rois, tuit les Tartars do monde, que por celes estranges contree estoient espandu, s'en vindrent a lui et le tenoient a signeur. Et cestui Cinghis Can mantenoit la seignorie bien e francement. Et que vos en diroie? Il hi vindrent si grant moutitudene de Tartars que ce estoit mervoille. Et quant Cinghis Can voit que il avoit si grant jens, il s'aparoille con arc et con autres lor armeure et vait conquistant por cels autres parties. Et vos di qu'il conquistirent bien VIII provences. Mes ne fasoit elz nulz maus, ne ne tollit elz lor coses; mes les menoit o lui por conquister des autres gens. Et en ceste mainere conquiste ceste grant moutitude de jens que vos avés oi. Et ceste jens, quant il voient la bone seignorie et la grant debonaireté de cest segnor, il aloient trop volunter avec lui. Et quant Cinghis Can ot amasé si grant moutitude de jens que tout le monde covrent, il dit

qu'il vuelt conquister grant partie do munde.

Adonc envoie sez messajes au Prester Johan – et ce fu a les MCC anz que avoit que Crist avoit nascu - il li mande qu'il vel sa fille prendre a feme. Et quant le Prester Johan oi ce que Cinghis Can li mande demandant sa fille a feme, il le tint a grant despit. Et dit: 'et comant ne a grant vergoigne Cinghis Can de demander ma fille a feme? Or ne set il que il est mes homes et mon sers? Or retornes a lui et li dites que je firoie [avant] ardoir ma fille que je le la donast a feme. Et li dites por ma part que je li mant qu'il conveint que je le met a mort, si com traitor et desliaus qu'il estoit contre son seignor'. Puis dist as messajes qu'il se partissent mantinant devant lui et que jamés ne tornasent. Et quant les mesajes oirent ce, il se partirent mantinant. Il alerent tant qu'il viendrent a lor seignor; et li content tout ce que li mande le Prestre Johan, que ne I fallent rien, tout por ordre.

*LXVI – Comant Cinghis Kaan aparoille sez jens por aler sor le Prester Johan*

Et quant Cinghis Can oi la grant vilenie que le Prestre Johan li mande, il en a si le cuer enflé que pou [se faut] que ne li creve dedenz son ventre. Car je vos di qu'il estoit home de trop grand seignorie. Il parole a chief de piece, et dit si aut que tuit cel que entor lui estoient [l'oi], qu'il ne vuelt jamés tinir la segnorie, se la grant vilanie que le Prester Joan li mande, se il ne le li veint plus chieremant que jamés fuisse vendue villanie a home. Et dit qu'il convint que porchainemant il li moustre se il est son sers. Et adonc fait sesmondre toutes sez jens et fait le greignor aparoillemant que jamés fust veu ne oi. Il fait bien savoir au Prestre Johan qu'il se defende tant com el poet, et comant il ala sour lui a tout so[n] e[n]fors. Et quant le Prestre Johan soit certainemant que Cinghis Can venoit sor lui a si grant jens, il en fait gas, et l'avoit por noiant, car il disoit que il n'estoient homes d'armes. Mes toutes foies il dit a soi meisme qu'il fira tout son po[o]ir por ce que, se il vient, qu'il le velent prendre et metre a male mort. Et adonc fait sesmundre et aparoiller toutes sez jens, por mantes parties et estranges. Il fait bien si grant esfors que de greignor ost ne aspicté mes parler. En tel maineres com vos avés oi s'aparoillent les une gens et le autre. Et porcoi vos firoie je lonc conte? Sachiés tout voiremant que Cinghis Can, con toutes sez jens, s'en vint en un gra[n]disime plain et biaus que Tanduc estoit appellés, que estoit au Prestre Johan: et iluec mist son canp. Et vos di qu'il estoient si grant moutitudine de jens que nulz poroit savoir le no[n]bre. Et iluec ot novelles comant le Prestre Johan venoit; et il n'ot joie, por ce que celle estoit belle plaigne et large por largemant fer bataille. Et por ce atendoit il iluec et desiroit mout sa venue por mesler a lui.

Mes atant laisse li contes a parlere de Cinghis Can et de sez homes et retornerou au Prestre Johan et as sez homes.

*LXVII – Comant le Prester Johan con sez jens ala a l'encontre de Cinghis Kaan.*

Or dit li contes que quant le Prestre Johan soit que Cinghis Can con toutes sez jenz venoient sor lui, il ala con toutes sez jens contre lui; et aleut tant qu'il furent venu en ceste plain de Tanduc et iluec mistrent canp pres a cel de Cinghis Can a XX milles. Et cascunes parties se repousent por estre fresces et haitiers le jor de la meslee.

En tel mainer com vos avés oi estoient les deus grandisme ostes en cel plain de Tanduc. Et un jor Cinghis Can fait venir devant soi astronique, qui estoient cristienz et saraçin, et comaunde elz qu'il le seussent a dire qui doit vincre la bataille entre lui e le Prestre Johan. Le strolique le virent por lor ars. Les saracin nen li en sevent dir verité; mes les cristiens le li monstrent apertemant. Car il ont devant lui une canne, et la trenchent por mi por lonc, et puis mistrent le une d'une part et l'autre d'autre et ne la tenoit nelui. Puis mistrent nom a une part de la canne Cinghis Can et a l'autre canne Prestre Johan; et distrent a Cinghis Can: 'Sire, or regardés cestes cannes et veés que ceste est votre nom et l'autre est le nom dou Prestre Johan; et por ce, quant nos auron fait nostre encantamant, celui que sa canne vendra sor l'autre vencra la bataille'. Cinghis Can dit que cel vuelt il bien veoir et dist a les astronique qu'il le li mostrent au plus tost que il porunt. Et adonc les astronique cristiens on le salterie et legent certes salmes, et font lor enchantemant. Et adonc la cane, la ou estoit le nom de Cinghis Can, san que nulle le tocchast, se jont a l'autre et monte sor cele dou Prestre Johan. Et ce fui voiante tuti celz que illuec estoient. Et quant Cinghis Can voit ce, il en ha grant joie. Et por ce qu'il treuve les cristiens en virite, il fist puis toutes fois grant honor as cristiens, et les one por homes de verité et vertables et out puis toites foies.

*LXVIII – Ci devise de la gran bataille que fu entre le Prester Johan e Cinghis Kaan*

Et aprés ce deus jors s'armarent andeus les parties et se conbatirent ensenble duremant. Et fu la gragnor bataille que fust jamés veue. Il hi oit gran maus et d'une part et d'autre, mes au dereant venqui la bataille Cinghis Can. Et fu en celle bataille ocis le Prestre Johan; et de celui jor avant perde sa tere que Cinghis Can la ala conquistant tout jor. Et si vos di que Cinghis Can, puis celle bataille, regna VI anz et ala conquistant maint castiaus et mant provinces. Mes a chief de VI anz ala a un chastiaus que avoit a non Caagin et iluec fu feru d'une sagite

eu genoeilz e de celui coux morut. Dont il fu grand domajes por ce qu'il estoit preudomes et sajes.

Or vos ai divisé comant les Tartars ont premermant seignor, ce fu Cinghis Can. Et encore vos ai contés comant il vinquirent premeremant le Prestre Johan. Or vos vueil conter de lor costumes et de lor usance.

[…]

*LXXIV – Ci devise de la grant provence de Tenduc*

Tenduc est une provence ver levant la o il ha viles et castiaus assez. Il sunt au grant can, car les desendent dou Prestre Johan sunt au grant can. La mestre cité est només Tenduc. Et de cest provence en est rois un dout legnagnes au Prestre Johan et encore est Prestre Johan. Si sachiés que le Prestre Johan est cristiens. Son nom est Giorgie. Il tient la tere por lo grant can; mes non pas tout celle que tenoit le Prestre Johan, mes aucune partie de celle. Mes si vos di que les grant kaan toutes foies ont donee de lor filles et de lor parens a les rois que reignent qui sunt dou lignajes au Prestre Johan.

En ceste provence se trouve les pieres dont l'açur se fait et hi n'i a asez et bones. Il hi a camelloit de poil de gamaus mut buens. Il vivent de bestiaumes et dou frout qu'il traient de la terre. Et encore hi si fait auques mercandies et ars.

La segnorie est a cristiens, ensi com je vos ai dit; mes il I a ydres asez et homes que adorent Maomet. Il hi a une jeneraison de jens que sunt appellés Argon, que vaut a dire en françois guasmul: ce est a dire qu'il sunt ne de deus generasion, de la legnee de celz de Tenduc [que adorent les ydres] et de celz que aorent Maomet. Il sunt biaus homes plus que le autre dou pais et plus sajes et plus mercaant.

Et sachiés que en ceste provence estoit le mestre seje dou Prestre Johan quant il seignorioit les Tartars et toute celles provences et reignes environ. Et encore hi demorent le sien descendens. Et cestui Jor[gie], que je vos ai només, est dou lignages dou Prestre Johan, sicom je vos ai eu conte dit; et est le soi[s]me seignor depuis le Prestre Johan. Et ce est le leu que nos appellon de ça [en] nostre pais Gogo et Magogo; mes il l'apellent Ung et Mungul. Et en cascune de ceste provence avoit une generasion de jens: en Ung estoient les Gog et en Mungul demoroit les Tartars.

[…]

*CIX – Ci devise d'un chastel de Taianfu.*

Et quant l'en se part de Pianfu et il ala por ponent deus jornee, adonc treuve l'en un biaus castel, qui est apellés Caiciu, le quel fist faire jadis un rois que fu apellés le roi Dor. Et en ceste chastiaus ha un mout biaus paleis, u quel a une grandisme sale la ou il sunt portrait a mout belles pointures tout les rois de celes provences que furent ansienemant: et ce est mout belle viste a voir. Et tout ce avoient fait fer les rois que en cel roiames avoient reignés. Et de cest roi Dor vos conterai une bielle novelle que fu entre lui et le Prestre Johan, selonc ce que les jens de celles contree dient.

Il fui voir, selonc que celles jens dient, que ceste roi Dor avoit ghere con le Prestre Joan; et estoit en si forte leu que le Prestre Johan ne le pooit allé sovre ne nuire. Il en avoit grant ire. Et VII valés do Prestre Johan li distrent que il aporterout tout vif gree se il ce font. Et quant le VII val[e]z ont en le conje dou Prestre Johan, il se partirent tuit ensenble [a bielle] conpagnie d'escuiers et s'en alent a cest roi Dor et li distrent qu'il estoient venu [d'estranje contree] por lui servir. Le roi dist elz qu'il soient li tres bien venus et qu'il fira elz honor et plaisir.

En tiel mainere com vos avés oi se mistrent les VII valés dou prestre Johan a servir le roi Dor. Et quant il hi furent demorés entor deus anz, il estoient mout ames dou roi por lor bien servir. Et que vos en diroie? Le roi se fioit d'elz ausint com se il tuit et VII fuissent sez filz. Or oirés que cesti mauveis vallés font. Et ce avint por ce que nulz se puet garder dou traitor et desoliaus. Il fui voir que ceste roi Dor s'ala desduiant con pou de jens et hi estoient cesti maveis VII vallés. Et quant il one pasés un flum que est logn do palais que je vos ai contés un mil, les VII vales que virent que le rois ne avoit conpagnie que vontr'aus le peussent defendre, adonc distrent qu'il pooient faire ce por coi il estoient venus. Adonc mistrent main a l'espee et distrent au rois: ou il alera avec elz ou il le metront a mort. Le roi, quant il voit ce, il en a grant mervoille; et dist elz: 'Et comant, biaus filz, et que est ce que vos dites et ou volés vos que je viegne?'. 'Vos vendrés, font il, dusque a nostre seignor le Prestre Johan'.

*CX – Comant le prister Joan fist prandre le roi Dor.*

Et quant le roi entent ce, il a si grant ire que poi se faut qu'il ne muert de duel. Et dit elz: 'Ai mercé, biaus filz. Or ne vos ai je honorés asez e[n] mon ostiaus? Et vos mes volés metre en les mains de mes ennemis. Certes, se vos ce faites, vos firés grant maus et grant desloiautes'. Celz distrent que il convent qu'el ensi soit. Et adonc le moinent au Prestre Johan. Et quant le Prestre Johan le vit, il en a grant joie. Il li dit qu'il soit le maus venu. Celui ne respont ne ne set que doie dire. Adonc comande le Prestre Johan que cest roi Dor soit

mené dehors et qu'il le feisent garder bestes. Et adonc fu mis le roi Dor a garder bestes; et ce li fasoit faire le Prestre Johan por despit lui et por desprisier et monstrer qu'il estoit noiant.

Et quan il ot gardé les bestes deus anz, il le se fait venir devant, le Prestre Johan, et li fait doner riches vestimens et li fait honor. Et puis li dit: 'Sire roi, or pues tu bien veoir que tu ne estoies homes de pooir gueroier con moi'. 'Certes, biaus sire', respont le roi, 'ce conois je bien et quenoisoie toutes voies que n'estoit home que peust contraster a vos'. 'Et quant tu ce ai dit', dit le Prestre Johan, 'je ne te demant plus ren; desormés te ferai servis et honor'. Adonc le Prestre Johan fait doner chevaus et arnois au roi Dor et li done mout belle conpagnie et le laise aler. Et cestui se part et torne a son regne et de cel ore en avant fu ses amis et son servior.

Or laison de ceste matiere et vos conteron d'autre matiere.

[…]

*CXXXIX – Ci devise de la Cite dé Cingiu*

Et quant l'en se part de la cité de Pingiu, il ala II jornee por midi, por mout belles contree e devicioses de tous bienz, la ou il a venesionz asez de toutes maineres de bestes et de osiaus. Et a chief de II jornee, treuve l'en la cité de Cingiu, que mout est grant et riche e de mercandies et d'ars. Les jens sunt ydres et font lor cors mors ardoir en feu. Lor monoie est de carte et sunt au grant kaan. Elle a trop biaus plainz et beus chans; et ont grant abondance de forment e de toutes blees. Mes autres couses que a mentovoir face n'i a; e por ce nos en partiron et vos conteron des autres teres avant.

Et quant l'en s'en part de ceste ville de Cingiu, il ala bien trois jornee por midi, la o l'en treuve bieles contrees et biaus castiaus et casaus et bielles gaagnaries de teres et de cans, venesionz et chacejonz asez et abondance de forment e de toutes bles. Il sunt ydres et sunt au grant can; lor monoie ont de carte.

Et a chief de ceste III jornee, treuve l'en le grant flunz de Caramoran, qui vient de la terre dou Prestre Joan, que mout est grant et large. Car sachiés qu'el est large un mil … .

[…]

*CC – Ci devise de la Grant Turquie*

En tel mainere venqui la bataille le roi Caidu. Il en croist en bonbant et [e]n orgoeil. et aprés ce que il ot vencue ceste bataille en tel mainere com vos avés oi, il s'en torne en son pais e demore bien II

anz en peis, que ne fist ost ne bataille; ne le grant kan ne le fist en tot cel termene gherre ne ost.

Or avint que a chief de Ii anz le roi Caidu asenble une grant ost, si que bien furent une grandisme jens d'omes a chevalz. Il savoit que a Caracoron estoit le filz au gran kan que avoit a non Nomogan, et avec lui estoit Giorge, le filz au filz dou Prestre Joan. Cesti II baronz avoient encore une grandismes jens d'omes a chevalz. Et que vos en diroie? Le roi Caidu, quant il ot asenblé toutes sez jens, il se parti de son reigne con toute sa oste; e se mist a la voie; e chavauchent tant por lor jornee, senz aucune venture trovere que a mentovoir face eu conte, que il furent venus auques pres a Caracoron, la o les deus baronz estoient con grandisme jens. E quant cesti II baronz – ce est le filz au gran kan e le filz au filz dou Prestre Joan – ont seu comant Caidu estoit venu en lor pais con si grant jens por conbatre a elz, il ne monstrent pas que il soient esbai, mes monstrent que il ont ardiment et valor. Il s'aparoillent molt bien con toutes lor jens que bien estoient plus de LX homes a chevaulz. E qua[n]t il furent bien aparoillés, il se mistrent a la voie et alent contre lor enemis. E que vos en diroie? Il alent tant que il furent venus pres au roi Caidu a X milles. Et ilu[e]c mistrent canp bien e ordreemant. E sachiés que le roi Caidu estoit con toutes celles jens atendés en cele plaigne meisme. Il se repousent chascus des parties e s'aparoillent au miaus qu'il puent por conbatre ensenble.

E porcoi vos firoie lonc conte? Sachiés tout voiremant que au ters jors, depuis que le filz au grant kan hi fu venu e le filz au [filz dou] Prestre Joan, de buen maintin chascune des parties s'armerent e s'aparoillent au miaus que il puent. Il ne ot grament d'avantajes da les une jens a le autres; car il ne I avoit nulles des parties que ne ause entor de LX homes a chevaz, bien armés d'ars e de sagites e de spee e de macques e de escuz. Il fait chascune part VI esciele; et en cascune esciele hi mistrent X homes a chevalz e buen conduseor. E quant les deus parties furent au ca[n]p atierés et aparoillés e ne atendoient for que il oisent sonere le nacar – car les Tartar ne osent comencer bataille jusque a tant que le nacar lor seignor ne comencent a soner, mes tant tost qu'ele sonent e il comencent la bataille; e si ont encore un tel costumes les Tartars que quant il sunt atirés que il atendent bataille, endementier que [il atendent que] le nacar comencent a soner, adonc il cantent et sonent lor estrumens de II cordes mout doucement e cantent e sonent e font grant seulas atendent toutes foies les batailles – e por ceste usance vos di que andeus ceste jens que estoient atierés et atendoient la bataille et le soner des nacar, il cantoient et sonent si bien que ce estoit mervoie a oir. E quant il furent demorés auques en tel mainere com je vos ai dit, et atendoient que il aoisent sone le nacar, atant comencent a soner le nacar

d'andeus pars. E que vos en diroie? Quant les nacar comencent a soner, les jens ne font plus deleament; mes tout mantinant laisent correr les unes jens contre les autre. Il mistrent les mains as ars; il encocquent lor sagites. Or en peust veoir tot l'aier coverte de sajetes com s'il fust pluie. Or peust veoir mant homes e mant chevaus estre feru mortaument. Or hi peust l'en oir le crier et la remote si grant que l'en ne oist dieu tonant. Certes il senbloient bien que il estoient ennimis mortaus. E porcoi vos firoie lonc cont? Sachiés tout voirement que tant come il one sagite ne finere[n]t de traire celz que sain e aitiés estoient. Car bien sachiés que il en avoit de mors e des enavrés a mart en grant quantité, si que de mauveis ore fu comencé celle bataille por andeus les part, tant en furent mors e d'une e puis el mistrent les mains a l'espee e a les macques e corent les un sor les autres. Il se comencerent a donere grandismes cous d'espee e de macques. Il comencent une bataille molt cruel e pesme. Or poet l'en veoir doner e recevere grandisme cous. Or poit l'en veoir trenchier main e bras. Or poit l'en veoir mant homes trebucer mors a la tere. Car sachiés tout voiremant que il ne demore grament, puis que il comencent la bataille de brant, que tout la tere estoit coverte d'omes mors et navrés a mors.

E sen fail le roi Caidu hi fisti grant proesce d'armes. E se son cors seulamant ne fust, il avroit plusors foies guerpi le ca[n]p e seroit desconfit. Mes la fasoit si bien e donoit si gran confort a sa jens que il se mantenoient mult ardiemant. E de l'autre partie le filz au grant kan, e le filz au filz dou Prestre Joan, le fistrent ausint mout bien.

E que vos aleroie disant? Sachiés voirmant que ceste fu une des plus cruelz bataille que onques fust entre Tartars de jens. Il hi estoit si grant la nose et le fereis de l'espee e de les macques, que l'en ne oist le dieu tonant. Encore vos di san faille que andeus les parties se esforcent de tout lor po[o]ir de metre a desconfiture le une jens les autres; et por ce se esforchoit cascun outre mesure. Mes vos di tout voiremant que la bataille dure jusque aprés vespre, ne le un ne poit chacer l'autre de canp. Mes en furent tant mors e d'une part e d'autre que ce estoit un pecié a veoir. Car de male hore furent comencés cele bataille por andeus par. Car maintes homes e[n] morurent e mantes dames en furent veves e maint enfans en furent orfanes; e mantes autres dames ne furent a toz jors mes en plores et en lermes: ce furent les meres et le serores de homes que hi morurent.

E quant la bataille fo tant duré como vos avés oi, et que ja tornoit le soleil au decli[n], et que tant en I avoit de mors come je vos ai contés, adonc convient que la bataille remagne a fine force. Et adonc se departirent et chascunz s'en torne a son canp, si las e si travaillés qu'el ne I avoit nul que ne ausse meior maistier de repouser que de conbatre. La nuit se repousent mout voluntier, por la travaille que il avoient sofert celui jor en cel grant bataille e mortiaus. E quant le

maitin fu venu, le roi Caidu, que avoit eu novelle que le grant kan mandoit une grant ost con grandismes jens por lui prendre et asaillir, il dit a soi mesme que il hi firoit desormés maus demorer. Et adonc, tant tost que l'aube apert, il se arme con toutes sez jens et montent a chevaus et si mistrent a la voie por retorner en lor contree. E quant le filz au grant kan et le nevo dou Prestre Joan virent que le roi Caidu a toutes sez jens s'en aloient, il ne li ailent deriere, mes le lairent aler quitemant, por ce que il estoient mout las e mont travaillés. [Et le roi Caidu con] sez jens chavauche[n]t tant por lor jornee qu'il ne s'arestent que il furent venus en lor reigne, ce est en la Grant Turquie a Sanmarcan. Et iluec demore auques que ne fait ghere.

## Marco Polo, Book of the Marvels of the World

*Date:* 1298–99 (?)

*[Marco Polo famously travelled to Asia in the middle of the thirteenth century, returning to his native Italy in 1295, where he was imprisoned. While incarcerated, he dictated his story to a romance writer named Rusticello of Pisa, who penned the text that became the basis for Marco's fame. This book, full of excursions into the legendary, is a confused mixture of legitimate observation and entertaining invention. In this excerpt, Marco describes Chingis Khan killing Prester John. Later, after Prester John had become associated with Ethiopia, early modern academic writers began to unravel the legend by arguing, based on these stories in Marco Polo, that Prester John was actually an Asian monarch, such was the authority that Marco Polo's book carried. Although distorted, the following excerpt does at points contain a veneer of factual historical events taking place in western China in the thirteenth century.]*

The Tartars lived in the north near Ciorcia[30]; and in this country there were great plains that did not have dwellings like cities and castles, but there were good pastures there and plenty of great rivers and lakes. They did not have lords, but they certainly paid tax to one great lord who was called in their language Unc Can, which means in French 'the great lord', and this was the Prester John of whose kingdom everyone speaks.[31] The Tartars paid him a tax of one animal for every ten. Now, it happened that they multiplied greatly. And when Prester John saw that they were such a great people, he said that they could harm him, and said that he would disperse them throughout many lands. And so he sent one of his barons there to do this. And when the Tartars heard what Prester John wanted to do to them, they became sad. They all departed together and headed for the

desert towards the north, where Prester John could not harm them. And they rejoiced because they no longer had to pay any tax. And so they stayed there for a long while.

*Chapter 65 – How Chingis was the first khan of the Tartars*

Now it happened that in the year 1187 from the incarnation of Christ, the Tartars made one of them king, and his name in their languages was Chingis Khan. And he was a man of great valour and great wisdom and great prowess. And indeed I tell you that when this man was chosen as king, all the Tartars of the world, who had spread throughout these foreign countries, came to him and held him as lord. And this Chingis Khan maintained the kingdom well and nobly. And what can I tell you? There became such a great multitude of Tartars there that it was marvellous. And when Chingis Khan saw that he had such a great people, he prepared them with bow and with other weapons of theirs and went conquering throughout certain other regions. And I tell you that they easily conquered eight provinces. But he did not do anything bad to them, nor did he take their things, but he took them with him to conquer other peoples. And in this way, he conquered this great multitude of people, as you have heard. And this people, when they saw the good kingdom and the great kindness of that lord, a great number of them willingly rallied to him. And when Chingis Khan had amassed such a great multitude of peoples, which covered the whole world, he said that he wished to conquer a great part of the world.

Then he sent his messengers to the Prester John – and this was in the year 1200 from the birth of Christ – [and] he sent word to him that he wanted him to give him his daughter as wife. And when the Prester John heard that Chingis Khan ordered him to give his daughter as wife, he was greatly outraged. And he said: 'How can Chingis Khan ask my daughter as wife without great shame? Does he not realise that he is my vassal and my servant? Go back and tell him that I would rather have my daughter burnt than give her to him as wife. And tell him on my behalf that I ought to put him to death if he acts like a traitor and a villain against his lord'.[32] Then he told the messengers to depart immediately from his presence and never return. And when the messengers heard this, they immediately departed. They went so far that they came to their lord, and they told him everything that the Prester John had said, omitting nothing, all in order.

*Chapter 66 – How Chingis Khan brought together his people to go against Prester John.*

And when Chingis Khan heard the great dishonour that the Prester John had done him, his heart was so enflamed that it almost burst from within his breast. And I should tell you that he was a man of great power. After a brief silence, he proclaimed in a voice so loud that every bystander could hear it, that he would on no account retain his sovereignty if the insult that the Prester John had done him did not cost its maker dearer than any insult had ever yet cost any man. And he said that he would soon show him that the Prester John was in fact his vassal. And so he brought all his people together and made the greatest army, which has ever been seen or heard of. He informed the Prester John that he was coming against him with all his forces, so that he could defend himself as best he could. And when the Prester John knew for certain that Chingis Khan was coming against him with such a great people, he made a mockery of it, and thought it as nothing, for he said that they were not men of arms. But nevertheless he said to himself inwardly that, if he came, he would do everything in his power that they would take him and put him to an evil death. And so he gathered all his people from lands far and wide. He made such a great army that no one has ever heard tell of a larger host. In this way, as you have heard, the one people was set up against the other. And why should I tell you a long story? You should know that in truth Chingis Khan, with all his people, came to a wide and beautiful plain called Tanduc,[33] which belonged to Prester John; and there he made his camp. And I tell you that they were such a great multitude of people that no one could know their number. And there he heard the news that the Prester John was coming, and he was glad, because that was a beautiful and large plain, large enough for battle. And for this reason he waited there and greatly desired his coming so he could join battle with him.

But now the story no longer speaks of Chingis Khan and his men and returns to the Prester John and his men.

*Chapter 67 – How the Prester John and his people made battle with Chingis Khan*

Now the story goes that when the Prester John knew that Chingis Khan was coming against him with all his people, he went against him with all his people; and they went so far that they came to this plain of Tenduc and there they made camp, twenty miles distant from that of Chingis Khan. And both sides rested so that they could be fresh and ready on the day of the battle.

In this way, as you have heard, these two enormous armies were on this plain of Tenduc. And one day Chingis Khan had his astronomers brought before him, both Christians and Saracens, and

commanded them to tell him who would win the battle between him and the Prester John. The astrologers performed their art. The Saracens were not able to tell him the truth of the matter, but the Christians showed it to him frankly. They placed before him a stick and split it through the middle lengthwise, then placed one half over here and the other over there, and no one was touching them. Then they put the name Chingis Khan on one half of the plank and on the other half that of Prester John, and they said to Chingis Khan: 'Sir, look now at these pieces of wood, and see that this one has your name on it and the other has the name of the Prester John, and when we have made our enchantment, whichever one of the pieces of wood ends up above the other will win the battle'. Chingis Khan said that he was very happy to see this and told the astrologers to show him as soon as possible. And so the Christian astrologers took up their psalter, read certain psalms, and made their enchantment. And then the piece of wood that had the name of Chingis Khan on it, without anyone touching it, touched the other and rose above that of the Prester John. And this was seen by all those who were there. And when Chingis Khan saw this, he rejoiced greatly. And because he found the Christians to be truthful, he thenceforth did great honour to Christians, and always held them to be truthful and reliable men.

*Chapter 68 – The proceedings of the great battle which took place between the Prester John and Chingis Khan.*

Then two days later, both sides armed themselves and fought each other bitterly. And the battle was so great that its like has never been seen. Heavy losses were sustained on both sides, but in the end Chingis Khan won the battle. And in this battle, Prester John was killed, and from that day Chingis Khan was constantly attacking that land which he held before he died. And I say to you that Chingis Khan reigned for six years after this battle and conquered many castles and many provinces. But at the end of these six years, he went to a castle called Caagiu and there he was wounded by an arrow to the knee and from this blow he was killed.[34] And this was a great shame, for he was a noble and wise man.

Now I have told you how the Tartars selected their first ruler, that being Chingis Khan. And I have also recounted how they first defeated Prester John. Now I will tell you about their clothes and their customs.

[…]

*Chapter 74 – The description of the province of Tenduc.*

Tenduc is a province towards the east that contains many villages and castles. They belong to the grand khan, because the subjects of the Prester John belong to the grand khan. The main city is called Tenduc.[35] And the king of this province is of the same lineage as the Prester John, and later he becomes Prester John. You should also know that the Prester John is a Christian. His name is George.[36] He holds the land for the grand khan, but not all that Prester John held, but only a small part of it. But indeed I tell you that the grand khans have always given their daughters and family members to the kings who reigned who are of the lineage of Prester John.

In this province, one can find plenty of good quality lapis lazuli. That place also produces very good robes of camel-hair. There are so many animals there and so much fruit drawn from the land. And they also engage in some commerce and art.

The kingdom belongs to the Christians as I have told you, but there are plenty of idolaters there and men who worship Muhammad. There is one group of people who are called Argon, which means in French 'Guasmul' [half-breeds], that is to say that they are of two peoples, from the lineage of the people of Tenduc (who worship idols), and of the people who worship Muhammad.[37] These men are more beautiful than the others of that country, and are also more wise and more entrepreneurial.

And you should know that in this province was the chief residence of the Prester John when he was ruling over the Tartars and all the nearby provinces and kingdoms. And it is here that his descendants still live. And that George, of whom I have already spoken, is of the lineage of Prester John, as I have already told you; and he is the sixth lord since Prester John. And this is the line that we call in our country Gog and Magog,[38] but they call them Ung and Mungul. And one group of people lived in each of these provinces: the Gog lived in Ung, and the Tartars lived in Mungul.

[…]

*Chapter 109 – The description of the castle of Taianfu.*

And when one leaves Pianfu[39] and travels west for two days, then one finds there a beautiful castle, which is called Caiciu,[40] which was once made by a king who was called the King of Gold.[41] And in this castle, there was a most beautiful palace, which had a great hall in which hung the most beautiful portraits of all the kings of those provinces who had existed in ancient times, and this was a most beautiful sight to see. And all this was made by the kings who reigned in those lands. And of this King of Gold, I will recount to you a nice

story about him and Prester John, according to that which the people from that country say.

It was apparent, or so these people say, that this King of Gold was at war with the Prester John, and he was in such a strong place that Prester John could in no way follow him or do him any harm. He became very angry about this. And seven squires of Prester John told him that they would willingly bring the King of Gold to him alive. And then the seven squires took their leave of the Prester John and departed with a good company of attendants and went to the King of Gold and told him that they had come from a distant country to serve him. The king told them that they were very welcome and that he would do them honour and treat them well.

In this way, as you have heard, the seven squires of the Prester John placed themselves at the service of the King of Gold. And after they had stayed there for around two years, they were much loved by the king because they served him so well. And what should I tell you? The king trusted them so much that it was as though the seven squires were his sons. Now listen to what these wicked squires did and you will realise that no one can protect himself from treachery and disloyalty. It was apparent that this King of Gold went out, taking with him a few people, among whom were these seven wicked squires. And when they passed a river which was about a mile distant from the palace of which I have spoken, the seven squires, seeing that the king had no company who could defend him, then resolved to carry out that for which they had come. Then they placed their hands on their swords and said to the king that either he would go with them or they would put him to death. The king, when he saw this, was greatly astonished, and said to them: 'And how is it that you are saying this to me, dear sons, and where would you have me go?' 'We are going to take you', they said, 'to our lord, the Prester John'.

*Chapter 110 – How the Prester John took the King of Gold.*

And when the king heard this, he was so shocked that he almost died of grief. And he said to them: 'Have mercy, good sons! Have I not done you great honour in my household? And you want to put me into the hands of my enemies? Surely, if you do this, you are committing a great evil and a great disloyalty'. They told him that this was the way it had to be. And then they took him to Prester John. And when the Prester John saw him, he was overjoyed. He told him that he was badly come. He did not respond, nor did he know what to say. So the Prester John ordered that this King of Gold be sent out and made to watch over beasts. And so the King of Gold was sent to watch over beasts, and Prester John made him do this so as to humiliate and

insult him, and to show that he was nothing.

And when he had watched over the beasts for two years, Prester John had him brought before him and he gave him rich robes and treated him honourably. And then he said to him: 'Lord king, now can you see clearly that you are no man to make war with me'. 'Certainly, good sir', replied the king, 'I know this well and I understand completely that there is no man who can stand against you'. 'Since you have said this', said the Prester John, 'I do not ask any more of you. From now on, I will do you service and honour'. So the Prester John ordered that a horse and a harness be given to the King of Gold as well as a very good retinue, and he was allowed to leave. And he departed and headed for his kingdom, and from that time onward he was his friend and servant.

Now we will finish this matter, and will discuss another with you.

[…]

*Chapter 139 – The description of the city of Cingiu.*[42]

And when one leaves the city of Pingiu,[43] he travels towards the south for two days through a beautiful country rich in all resources, and there are plenty of all kinds of beasts and birds there to hunt. And at the end of the second day's journey, you may find the city of Cingiu, which is very large and rich in commerce and art. The people are idolaters and they have the bodies of their dead burnt in fire. Their money is made of paper and they are subjects of the grand khan. The city holds possession of beautiful plains and fields, and has a great abundance of crops and every kind of grain. But there is little else to mention, and so we will now skip over the details and turn to other matters.

And when one leaves the city of Cingiu, he travels for three long days towards the south, where one finds good countries and beautiful castles and villages, and beautiful tilled fields, with plenty of animals to hunt and with an abundance of crops and every kind of grain. The inhabitants are idolaters and subjects of the grand khan; their money is made of paper.

And at the end of the third day's journey, one finds the great river of Caramoran,[44] which flows from the land of the Prester John, which is very great and wide. And you should know that it is one mile wide …

[…]

*Chapter 200 – the Description of the Great Turkey*

In this way, King Caidu won the battle.[45] Because of this, he increased in arrogance and pride. And after he had won this battle in this way, as you have heard, he returned to his country and remained there in peace for a good two years, and at that time he did not make war on anyone; neither he nor the great khan made war against each other throughout that whole time.

Now, at the end of that two years, King Caidu gathered a great army, a tremendous host of men on horseback. He knew that the son of the great khan [Kublai], whose name was Nomogan,[46] was at Caracorum [Karakorum], and that with him was George, the son of the son of the Prester John.[47] These two barons also had a tremendous host of men on horseback. And what can I tell you? King Caidu, once he had assembled all his men, departed his kingdom with his entire army, and they made their way, and they rode all through the day without any adventures worthy of recounting, until they arrived at Caracoron [Karakorum], where the two barons were with their great armies. And when these two barons, that is the son of the great khan and the son of the son of Prester John, had seen that Caidu had arrived in their country to combat them with such a large army, they did not show that they were afraid, but showed that they were keen and ready. They made ready with all their men, who were easily more than sixty [thousand] men on horseback. And when they were all ready, he sent them forward and they went against their enemies. And what can I tell you? They went so close that they were within ten miles of King Caidu. And there they made their camp in a good and orderly fashion. And you should know that King Caidu was waiting with all his men on this same plain. Both sides rested and prepared themselves as best they could to battle each other.

And why should I make a long tale of it? You should know indeed that on the third day after the son of the great khan and the son of the son of Prester John had arrived there, both sides prepared and arranged themselves as best they could. Neither side had any particular advantage over the other, for both sides were made up of sixty [thousand] cavalrymen well equipped with bows, arrows, spears, maces, and shields. Both sides were drawn up into six squadrons, and in each squadron were ten cavalrymen and one good captain. And when the two sides were dressed and ready, they waited until they heard the sound of the kettle drum, for the Tartars do not dare to commence battle unless their lord's kettle drum has begun to sound, but as soon as it sounds, they commence the battle. And if the Tartars are already dressed in their clothes, while they are waiting for the kettle drum to sound, they sing and play their two-stringed instruments most sweetly and always make a great revelry while waiting for battle, and for this reason I say to you that both these

armies, once they were dressed and waiting for the battle to begin and for the kettle drum to sound, sang and made such beautiful music that it was marvellous to hear. And when both sides were delaying in such a way as I have told you, and waiting until they heard the sound of the kettle drum, both sides began to beat their drums. And what can I tell you? When the drums began to sound, the soldiers made no further delay, but at once both sides began to charge at one another. They put their hands on their bows; they readied their arrows. Then you could have seen the air filled with arrows as though it were raining. Then you could have seen many men and many horses mortally wounded. Then you could have heard there such a great hue and cry that you would not have heard God thundering. Certainly it was plainly visible that these two peoples were mortal enemies. And why should I make a long story of it? You should indeed know that those who were still alive and well did not cease shooting their arrows. For you should know that there was a large number of dead and wounded, such that it was an ill hour for both sides when the battle was begun, since so many were killed. They then put their hands to their swords and to their maces and charged against one another. They began to give each other great blows with their swords and maces. They began a most cruel and wicked battle. Then you could have seen great blows being given and received. Then you could have seen hands and arms severed. Then you could have seen many men fall to the ground dead. Indeed, you should know that not long after the beginning of the clash of blades, the whole land was covered with men dead and wounded to death.

And without a doubt, King Caidu displayed there a great strength of arms. And had he himself not been there in person, [his army] would have fled the field many times and been defeated. But he conducted himself so well and gave such great comfort to his people that they held themselves very firmly. And on the other side, the son of the great khan and the son of the son of Prester John also fought very well.

And what more can I tell you? You should indeed know that this was one of the most cruel battles that was ever fought between Tartar peoples. And there was such a great noise and clashing of swords and maces that one would not have heard God thundering. Again, I tell you without deceit that both sides did everything they could to defeat the other side, and they all pushed themselves with all their might. But I tell you truthfully that the battle lasted until after vespers [sunset], and neither side was able to chase the other from the field. But there were so many dead on both sides that it was a pity to see. For this battle was begun at an evil hour for both parties. For many men died there, and many wives were made widows, and many

children were made orphans, and many other women could do nothing but cry and weep forever more: these were the mothers and sisters of the men who died there.

And when the battle had proceeded as you have heard, and the sun began to set, and there were so many dead as I have told you, then the battle was abandoned out of sheer necessity. And then everyone left and returned to their camp, so worn out and exhausted that everyone there was more interested in resting than in fighting. They rested themselves most willingly for the night, for the effort that they had exerted on that day in the great battle and destruction. And when morning came, King Caidu, who had heard news that the great khan [Kublai] ordered a great army to take him and assail him, he said to himself that it would be a bad idea to stay there. And so, as dawn was approaching, he armed himself, got onto his horse, and embarked with all his men upon the road to return to their country. And when the son of the great khan and the grandson of the Prester John saw that the King Caidu was departing with all his men, they did not follow behind them, but let them go peacefully, because they [themselves] were very weary and exhausted. And the King Caidu rode with his men for such a long journey that they did not stop until they had arrived at their kingdom, that is, at Samarkand in the Great Turkey.[48] And they stayed there for a while without making war.

**John of Monte Corvino, Epistola II**

*Date:* 8th January, 1305

*De bono rege Georgio*

**4.** Quidam rex illius regionis de septa nestorianorum christianorum, qui erat de genere illius magni regis qui dictus fuit Presbiter Iohannes de Yndia, primo anno quo huc ego veni michi adhesid et ad veritatem vere fidei catholice per me conversus, minores ordines suscepit, michique celebranti sacris vestibus indutus ministravit, ita quod alii nestoriani ipsum de apostasia accusaverunt. Tamen ipse magnam populi sui partem ad veram fidem catholicam adduxit, et ecclesiam pulchram secundum regiam magnificentiam construxit ad honorem Dei nostri, Sancte Trinitatis et domini pape et nomine meo vocans eam ecclesiam romanam. Qui rex Georgius ante VI annos migravit ad dominum verus christianus, relicto filio herede in cunabulis, qui nunc est annorum novem. Fratres tamen ipsius regis Georgii cum essent perfidi in erroribus Nestorii, omnes quos ille converterat, post regis obitum, subverterunt, ad scisma pristinum reducendo. Et quia ego fui

solus nec potui recedere ab imperatore Chaam, ire non potui ad illam ecclesiam que distat ad XX dietas. Tamen si venerint aliqui boni coadiutores et cooperatores, spero in Deo quod totum poterit reformari; nam adhuc habeo privilegium predicti regis Georgii defuncti.

## John of Monte Corvino, Letter II

*Date:* 8th January, 1305

*[John of Monte Corvino was an Italian missionary sent in 1289 to evangelise the Mongols. After travelling through Turkey, Persia, and India, he set up a base in the Mongol Yuán dynasty capital of Khanbaliq (modern Běijīng) and quickly set to work proselytising. He oversaw the construction of two churches and managed to convert thousands, so he says, including a number of high-profile Mongols. John sent letters to the Pope requesting assistance but precious little support came, and after John's death in 1328, Catholicism in China slowly dwindled until, in 1368, all Christians were expelled from China when the ethnic Chinese Ming dynasty overthrew the Mongol Yuán dynasty. In this excerpt, John describes his conversion of a high profile Mongol lord who is presented as a descendant of Prester John.]*

*Of Good King George*[49]

A certain king of that region, of the sect[50] of the Nestorian Christians, who was from the progeny of that great king who was called Prester John of India, in the first year in which I came there [1294], he received minor orders and, donning the sacred vestments, he assisted me when I was celebrating Mass such that the other Nestorians accused him of apostasy. Nevertheless, he brought a great portion of his people to the true Catholic faith, and according to his royal generosity, he built a beautiful church in honour of our God, the Holy Trinity, and the Lord Pope, calling it for my sake 'the Roman Church'. Within six years, this King George departed to the Lord a true Christian, leaving his son and heir in the cradle, and he is now nine years old. But the brothers of King George, since they were faithless men of the error of Nestorius, after he had died, they perverted all those whom he had converted, leading them back to their former schism. And because I was alone and not able to depart the emperor the Khan, I was unable to go to that church which was twenty days distant. However, if any good assistants and coworkers came, I hope in God that they can all be restored, for even now I hold the grant of the aforesaid deceased King George.

**Jean de Joinville, La Vie de Saint Louis**

*Date:* 1309

*XCIII (Comment les Tartares choisirent un chefpour s'affranchir du prêtre Jean et de l'empereur de Perse.)*

**471.** Aussi comme je vous diz devant, tandis que li roys sejornoit en Cypre, vindrent li messaige des Tartarins à li, et li firent entendant que il li aideraient à conquerre le royaume de Jerusalem sur les Sarrazins. Li roys lour renvoia ses messaiges, et par ses messaiges, que il lour envoia, lour envoia une chapelle, que il lour fist faire d'escarlate (et pour aus atraire à nostre créance, il lour fist entaillier, en la chapelle, toute nostre créance, l'Annonciation de l'angre, la Nativitei, le bauptesme, dont Diex fu baptiziez, et toute la Passion et l'Ascension et l'avenement dou Saint-Esperit); calices, livres, et tout ce que il convint à messe chanter, et dous freres Preescheours pour chanter les messes devant aus.

**472.** Li messagier le roy ariverent au port d'Anthioche; et dès Anthyoche jusques à lour grant roy trouverent bien un an d'aleure, à chevauchier dix lieues le jour. Toute la terre trouverent sougiette à aus, et plusours citez que il avoient destruites, et grans monciaus d'os de gens mors.

**473.** Il enquistrent comme il estoient venu en tel auctoritei, par quoy il avoient tant de gens mors et confondus; et la maniere fu teix, aussi comme il le raporterent au roy: que il estoient venu et concréei d'une grant berrie de sablon, là où il ne croissoit nul bien. Cette berrie commençoit à unes très grans roches merveillouses, qui sont en la fin dou monde devers Orient, lesquiex roches nulz hons ne passa onques, si comme li Tartarin le tesmoignent; et disoient que léans estoit enclos li peuples Got et Margoth, qui doivent venir en la fin dou monde, quant Antecriz venra pour tout destruire.

**474.** En celle berrie estoit li peuples des Tartarins, et estoient sougiet à prestre Jehan et à l'empereur de Perce, cui terre venoit après la seue, et à plusours autres roys mescréans, à cui il rendoient tréu et servaige chascun an, pour raison dou pasturaige de lour bestes; car il ne vivoient d'autre chose. Cis prestres Jehans et li emperieres de Perce, et li autre roy, tenoient en tel despit les Tartarins, que quant il lour aportoient lour rentes, il ne les vouloient recevoir devant aux, ains lour tournoient les dos.

**475.** Entre aus out un saige home, qui cercha toutes les berries, et parla aus saiges homes des berries et des leius, et lour monstra le servaige là où il estoient, et lour pria à touz que il meissent consoil comment il ississent dou servaige là où on les tenoit. Tant fist que il

les assembla trestous ou chief de la berrie, endroit la terre prestre Jehan, et lour monstra ces choses; et il li respondirent que il devisast, et il feroient. Et il dist ainsi, que il n'avoient pooir de esploitier se il n'avoient un roy et un signour sur aus; et il lour enseigna la maniere comment il averoient roy, et il le creurent.

**476.** Et la maniere fu teix, que de cinquante-dous generacions, que il y avoit, chascune generacions li aportast une suiete, qui fussent seignies de lour nons; et par l'acort de tout le peuple, fu ainsi acordei que l'on meteroit ces cinquantedous devant un enfant de cinc ans; et celle que li enfes penroit premier, de celle generacion feroit l'on roy. Quant li enfes ot levée une des seetes, li saiges hons fist traire ariere toutes les autres generacions; et fu establi en tel maniere, que la generacions dont l'on devoit faire roy, esliroient entre lour cinquante-dous des plus saiges homes et des meillours, que il averoient. Quant il furent esleu, chascuns y porta une saiete seignie de son non.

**477.** Lors fu acordei que la saiete que li enfes leveroit, de celle feroit l'on roy. Et li enfes en leva une, d'icelui saige home, qui ainsi les avoit enseigniez; et lie peuples en furent si lie que chascuns en fist grant joie. Il les fist taire, et lour dist: 'Signour, se vous voulez que je soie vostre roys, vous me jurerez par Celi qui a fait le ciel et la terre, que vous tenrés mes commandemens'. Et il le jurerent.

**478.** Li establissement que il lour donna, ce fu pour tenir le peuple en paiz; et furent tel, que nus n'i ravist autrui chose, ne que li uns ne ferist l'autre, se il ne vouloit le poing perdre; ne que nulz n'eust compaingnie à autrui femme ne à autrui fille, se il ne vouloit perdre le poing ou la vie. Mout d'autres bons establissemens lour donna pour pais avoir.

*XCIV (Victoire des Tartares sur le prêtre Jean; vision d'un de leurs princes; sa conversion)*

**479.** Après ce que il les ot ordenez et aréez, il lour dist: 'Signour, li plus forz ennemis que nous aiens, c'est prestres Jehans. Et je vous commant que vous soiés demain tuit appareillié pour li courre sus; et se il est ainsi que il nous desconfise (dont Diex nous gart!), face chascuns le miex que il porra. Et se nous le desconfisons, je commant que la chose dure trois jours et trois nuis, et que nulz ne soit si hardis que il mette main à nul gaaing, mais que à gens occire; car après ce que nous averons eue victoire, je vous departirai le gaing si bien et si loialment, que chascuns s'en tenra apaiez'. A ceste chose il s'acorderent tuit.

**480.** L'endemain coururent sus lour ennemis, et ainsi comme Diex vout les desconfirent. Touz ceus que il trouverent en armes deffendables, occistrent touz; et ceus que il trouverent en abit de

religion, les prestres et les autres religious n'occistrent pas. Li autre peuple de la terre prestre Jehan, qui ne furent pas en bataille, se mistrent tuit en lour subjection.

**Jean de Joinville, The Life of St Louis**

*Date:* 1309

*[Jean de Joinville was a French nobleman who tookpart in the Seventh Crusade (124854) with King Louis IX of France, and later wrote from memory a text detailing these events, from which the following is excerpted. Jean is unique as a writer in that he was more knight than scholar, and so his account is perhaps more frank than is the medieval norm. The* Life *was written decades after the fact, leading some details to be perhaps factually unreliable. In the following excerpt, Jean describes, with creative embellishment, the by now common story of the Mongols killing their overlord Prester John. Jean alleges that he heard this story from the Mongols themselves.]*

*Chapter 93 – How the Tartars chose a leader to free themselves from Prester John and from the Emperor of Persia.*

As I told you above, while the king [Louis IX] was staying in Cyprus, messengers of the Tartars came to him and gave him to understand that they would help him conquer the kingdom of Jerusalem from the Saracens. The king sent his own messengers back [to the Mongols], and along with his messengers which he sent them, he sent them a portable chapel[51] which he had made for them out of scarlet, (and so as to draw them towards our faith, he had [the history of] our entire faith carved on that tapestry: the Annunciation of the Angel [Gabriel], the Nativity, the Baptism, through which God was baptised, and all the Passion and the Ascension and the arrival of the Holy Spirit); [he also sent them] chalices, books, and everything that was necessary to sing mass, and two Friars Preachers to sing mass before them.

The king's messengers arrived at the port of Antioch, and from Antioch to their great king they had easily a year's travel, riding ten leagues per day. They found that all the land was subject to them [the Mongols] and that they had destroyed many of the cities, and that there were large mountains of the bones of dead people.

They [the messengers] asked how they [the Mongols] had come to hold such power, because they had the authority to make it such that there were so many dead and defeated people, and the manner of it

was this, as they [had] reported it to the king [Louis] that they had come and emerged from a great sandy desert, where no good thing grew. This desert begins at a [length of] very great and marvellous cliffs, which are at the end of the world towards the Orient; no man ever passes these cliffs, as the Tartars confirm, and they said that the peoples of Gog and Magog were enclosed within, who are set to come at the end of the world, when the Antichrist will come to destroy everything.[52]

In this desert was the people of the Tartars, and they were subject to Prester John and to the emperor of Persia, whose land was beyond his, and to many other infidel kings, to whom they paid tribute and homage every year, for the sake of the pasturage of their animals; indeed, they did not live on anything else. This Prester John and the emperor of Persia, and the other kings, held the Tartars in such contempt that when they brought them their payments, they did not want to receive them in front of them, but would turn their backs on them.

Amongst them was a wise man who toured all the deserts and spoke to the wise men of the deserts and of the surrounding areas, and showed them the signs of the slavery in which they were being held, and he begged them all to take counsel as to how they might get out of the slavery in which they were being held. He did so much that he managed to bring them all together at the entrance to the desert, near the land of Prester John, and he showed them these things, and they responded to him that they would do whatever he told them. And so he said they did not have the power to act if they did not have a king and a lord above them, and he showed them the way they would procure a king, and they believed him.

And the way was this: that of the 52 tribes who were there, each was to bring him an arrow, which was to be signed with their names, and with the agreement of all the people, it was ordained that someone would place these 52 arrows before a child of five years of age, and whichever arrow the child chose first, they would make someone from that tribe king. Having picked up one of the arrows, the wise man made all the other tribes step back, and it was established in this way that the tribe from which they were to make the king would elect from among them one of the wisest and best men they had. And when they had been elected, each of them carried with them an arrow signed with their name.

Then it was agreed that the man whose arrow the child picked up would be made king. And the child picked up one belonging to that very wise man who had proposed these proceedings, and the peoples were so joyful at this that each rejoiced greatly. He made them silent, and said to them: ‘Lords, if you want me to be your king, you will

swear to me by Him who made heaven and earth that you will obey my commandments'. And they swore it.

Then he made provisions to keep the peace amongst the people, and they were these: that no one would steal anything from anyone else, that no one would strike another person unless he wished to lose his hand, that no one would take anyone else's wife or daughter unless he wished to lose his hand or his life. He made many other good provisions to keep them in peace.

*Chapter 94 – The victory of the Tartars over Prester John, the vision of one of their princes, his conversion.*

After he had arranged and ordered these things, he said to them: 'My Lords, the strongest of our enemies is Prester John. And I command that tomorrow you all be ready to move against him, and if it happens that he defeats us (may God spare us from this!), may everyone do the best he can. And if we defeat him, I command that the occasion extend for three days and three nights, and that no one be so bold as to put his hand to spoils, but rather kill people, because after we have secured the victory, I will distribute the spoils among you so well and so fairly that everyone will be satisfied'. To this they all agreed.

The next day they moved against their enemies, and they were victorious, as God had wished. They killed all those whom they found defending with arms, and they did not kill any whom they found in religious garb, the priests and the other religious men. The other people of the land of Prester John who were not in the conflict all placed themselves in their power.

**Odoricus de Portu Naonis, Relatio**

*Date:* 1330

*Capitulum XXXII – De provincia Casairon magni Canis que est ita habitata quod quando per portam unius civitatis exitur, porta alterius civitatis videtur.*

**1.** De isto Catayo recedens et veniens versus ponentem seu occidentem, dictis transeundo per multas civitates et terras veni versus terram Prestiçane, de quo non est centesima pars eius quod quasi pro certo dicitur de ipso. Eius civitas principalis Cosan vocatur, que tamen ipsa Vincencia melior civitas diceretur quam illa civitas Cosan, sua civitas principalis; multas alias civitates sub se habet. Sed semper pro

pacto accipit in uxorem filiam magni Canis.

### Odoric of Pordenone, Tract

*Date:* 1330

*[Odoric of Pordenone was an Italian Franciscan missionary who went on a decade-long journey throughout Asia from 1318 to 1329/30. In this short excerpt, Odoric expresses doubt about Prester John, whose lands he says he passed through. It is important to note, however, that, like the previous sceptics William of Rubruck and Roger Bacon, Odoric does not doubt the existence of Prester John entirely, but only his reputation for greatness.]*

*Chapter 32 – Of the province of the Great Khan Casairon [Khwarezm?]*

Departing from this Cathay and coming by the planned route, that is, towards the west, by crossing through many cities and lands, I came towards the land of Prestiçane [Prester John], and not one hundredth part is true of that which is said of him as though it were undeniable. His principal city is called Cosan,[53] but Vincencia [i.e. Vicenza in Italy], however, is said to be a larger city than that city of Cosan, his principal city; he has many other cities under him. Also, in marriage he always takes the daughter of the great Khan to wife.[54]

### John Mandeville, Travels

*Date:* c.1360s (?)

*[Mandeville's* Travels *was one of the most famous and widely circulated of late medieval travel texts, despite the fact that the work was one of fictive invention, a process of authorial compilation rather than legitimate journey. The exact identity of the text's author remains elusive. The text borrows from various travel accounts, including those of Marco Polo, Odoric of Pordenone, and John de Plano Carpini, as well as the* Prester John Letter. *The original language of the text remains the subject of polemic, but was probably Anglo-Norman. An early English version is presented here for the sake of character. Difficult vocabulary have been given in brackets, and it will help to remember that'd' can sometimes stand in for 'th'; 'u' and 'v' are interchangeable; and 'y' and 'i' are interchangeable.]*

And ye shal understonde that the lond of Prester John, emperour of

Ynde, is under us. For if a man shal go fro Skotlond other [or] Ingelond toward Jerusalem, he shal go ever upward, for our londe is in the lowest partye of the west, and the lond of Prester John is in the lowest partye of the est. And they have day when we have nyght, and nyght when we have day. And as moch as a man ryseth upward out of our contré toward Jerusalem, as moch shal he go donward toward the lond of Prester John fro Jerusalem, and that is for [because] all the erthe is round.

Now ye have y-hurd [heard] telle that Jerusalem is in the myddel of the worlde, and that may wel be y-preved [proven] thus: for and a man ther take a sper [spear] and set hit [it] evene in the erthe at mydday, when the nyght and the day is y-lyche [equally] longe, the sper maketh no shadowe. And David bereth wytnesse when he seyth thus: *Deus operatus est salutem in medio terre.* That is to say: 'God hath y-wrought hele [healing, i.e. salvation] in the myddel of the erthe'. And therefore they that goth out of oure contrees of the west toward Jerusalem, as many journeyes as they make to go theder [thither] upward, as many journeys shal they make to go into the lond of Prester John donward fro Jerusalem. And so he may go into thes yles, evene round all the roundnesse of the erthe and of the see, tyl he come evene under us.

[…]

… for this Gret Chane [of the Mongols] is the grettest lord of the worlde. For Prester John is noght so gret as he, ne [nor] the soudan of Babyloyn, ne the emperour of Perce ne of Grece.

This peple byleveth on God that makide all the worlde, and yit have they idoles of goold and sylver. And to thes idoles they offre the formest [best] mylk of her beestes. And this Gret Chane hath 3 wyves, and the ferst most principal was Prester Johnis doughter.[55]

[…]

*The Lond of Prester John. Capitulum Vicesimum [Chapter 20]*

Fro this lond of Bacarie [Bukhara], men goon many journeys to the lond of Prester John, that is the emperour of Ynde, that men callen his lond Pentoxorie.[56] This emperour Prester John hath many good citees and tounes and many gret iles and large, for the lond of Ynde is departed [abundant] in iles by cause of the gret floodes that cometh out of Paradis. And also in the see beth many gret iles. And the best cité of Pentoxorie is y-called Nyse, for that is a noble cité and a ryche

[one].

Prester John hath under hym many kynges and many diverse peeple. And his lond is good and ryche, but noght so ryche as the lond of the Gret Chane. For marchauntes cometh noght so moche thider as they doon to the lond of the Gret Chane, for hit is longer way. And also they fyndeth in the ile of Catay [Cathay] all that they have nede to, as spices, clothes of goolde, and of other thyng. And thow hit be beter chepe [cheaper] in the lond of Prester John, yit they leve hit [abandon it] for the lenger way and gret periles of the see. For in the see beth many places wher ben many roches [rocks] of adamaundes [adamants], which of his owene kynde draweth yre [iron] to hym. For Y [I] went ones in that see, and Y say as hit had y-be a gret ile of trees growyng as stockes [stalks]. And our shipmen sayde that thilke [those] trees were of shippes mastes that sayled on the see, and so abode the shippes ther thorgh vertu [through virtue] of the adamaund.

The lond of Prester John is longe, and marchauntes [merchants] cometh thider thorgh the lond of Perce and cometh to a cité that is y-called Ermes, for a philosopher that men called Ermes founded hit.[57] And then is another cité that is y-called Soboth. And ther is lytel whete and barlich [barley], and therefore they eten ryse and mylke and chese and other fruytes. And ther ben gret plenté of popynjayes [parrots], as ben in other contreyes of larkes.

This emperour Prester John weddeth communely [commonly] the doghter of the Gret Chane, and the Gret Chane his doghter.[58] In this lond beth many precious stones so gret and brode that they make vessel thereof, as platers, coppes, and other thynges. This Prester John is Cristen and a gret party of his lond also, but they have noght alle the articles of our feith. For they byleve wel on the Fader, Sone, and Holy Gost, and they make noon fors of no catel [do not cook beef]. And Prester John hath under hym 72 provinces other contreys, and ech hath a kynge, and thilke kynges haveth other kynges under hem.[59]

And in this lond beth many mervailes [marvels], for in that lond is the Gravel See, that is al sonde [sand] and gravel and no water, and ebbeth and floweth with gret wawes [waves] as the see dooth. And hit resteth never, ne [and] no man may passe that see with shippe neyther noon other wyse [ways]. And in that see men fyndeth good fissh of other shap [shape] than is in other sees, and of good savour [taste] and good to ete. In that contrée is a playn among hilles. In the playn groweth trees that at sonne rysing every day bygynneth to growe. And so they groweth til mydday and berith fruyt, but men der noght ete thereof for hit is maner of ire [made of iron]. And after mydday hit turneth agayn to the erthe, so that when the sonne is doune hit is nothyng y-sene.[60]

In that contré beth many popinjayes [parrots] spekyng, the which spekith of her owen kynde as pertly as doth men.

When this emperour Prester John weyndith [goes] to batayle he hath no baner [banner] tofore hym. But he hath thre crosses y-bore byfore hym, oon of fyne goold, and thilke beth wel y-dight [arranged] with precious stones. And for kepyng of every crosse beth ordeyned 1,000 men of armes and mo than 100,000 of foot men, in the maner as men kepeth a standard in batayle. And when he rideth in another maner in lond of pees [at peace], then hath he y-bore byfore hym a crosse of tree, noght y-peynted and withoute goold and sylver and precious stones. And hit is all playn in tokneynge that Our Lord deyed on a crosse of tre. And also he hath y-bore byfore hym a plate of goold full of erthe, in tokenynge [token] that his lordship and his noble aray is noght and shal turne into erthe agayne. And also another vessel is y-bore byfore hym ful of jewels and goold and precious stones, in tocknynge of his nobley [nobility] and his myght.[61]

Prester John dwelleth at the cité of Suse, and ther is his chief palays.[62] And above the chief tour [tower] beth two pomelles [little apples] of goolde all rounde, and eyther of tho hath two charbocles [carbuncles] gret and large that shyneth ryght cleer uppon the nyght. And the chief gates of that palays beth of precious stones that men calle sardyn [sardonyx], and the bordure of barres beth of yvour [ivory], and the wyndowes of the halle and chamber of cristal. And the tables which they ete uppon beth of emeraudes somme [some made of emeralds], and som of mastyk [resin], and somme of goold and other precious stones.[63] And the pelers [pillars] that bereth these tables beth also of precious stones.[64]

And the greces [steps] uppon the which he goth to his mete [meal] and to his sege [seat] wher he sitteth, oon is of mastyk, another of cristal, another of jaspe [jasper], and other precious stones. And alle the greces ben y-bordured with fyne goolde and wel y-dight [arranged] with gret pyleres [pillars] and precious stones. The pylers in the chambre beth of fyne goold with many charbocles that geveth gret lyght, and ther brenneth also in his chambre every nyght 12 gret vesselles of cristal ful of baume [balm], to geve good smel in the chambre. The forme of his bed is ful of safyres [sapphires] and wel y-boonde [bound] with goolde, to make hym slepe wel and to destruye lecherye. For he wole noght lye by his wyves but thries [thrice] in the yer, and all for getyng of children.[65]

*Aray of the Court of Prester John. Capitulum Vicesimum Primum [Chapter 21]*

Also he hath a faire palays at the cité of Nyse, wher he dwelleth when

hym liketh.[66] And he hath every day in his court mo than 30,000 persones, withoute strangers that cometh and gooth. But 30,000 ther is, and in the coort of the Gret Chane of Cathay spendeth noght so moche as hys doth, for 12,000 men he hath evermore. And he hath 7 kynges in his court to serve hym and every of ham [each of them] serveth a monthe aboute. And with every kyng serveth every day 72 dukes and 300 erles. And every day eteth in his court 12 erchebysshoppes and 12 other bysshoppes. The patriarke of Seynt Thomas is as he were a pope and erchebysshop, bysshop, and abbot, and ther beth alle the kynges. And som of these lordes ben maistres of the halle, and som of chambre, som stywardes, som marchalles, and som other offecers, and therefore he is ful ryal [royal].

In this lond was somtyme a ryche man that men called Catholonabeus, and he had a fayre castel uppon an hylle and a strong.[67] And he had y-lete make [ordered to be made] a good walle all aboute the hille, and withynne was a fair gardeyn in which were many fair trees beryng all maner fruyt that he myghte fynde. And he let plante [had planted] therynne of alle maner herbes and of good smel. And ther were many fayre welles [pools] thereby, and by hem were y-maked many fayre halles and chambres, wel y-dyght [arranged] with goold and asure [azure]. And he hadde y-leet make [ordered to be made] bryddes [birds] and beestis [beasts] that turned aboute by gynne [engine] in an orlage [clock], and songe as they had be quyke [as if they were real]. And he had in his gardeynes maydens of 15 yer olde, the fairest that he myghte fynde, and knave children [boys] of the same elde, and they were clothed in clothes of goolde and he sayde that thay were angeles. And he had y-maked a condite [pipeline] under erthe so that when he wolde, that condyte shold renne somtyme mylke, somtyme wyne, and somtyme hony. And this place is called Paradis. And when any yong bacheler of that contré, knyght other [or] squyer [squire], cometh to hym for to solacy [entertain] hym and disporte [please] hym, he ledith hym into his Paradis and showeth hym all these diverse thynges and his damyselles and hys welles [pools], and he dyd smyte hys instrumentz of muskye in a heye tour [high tower] that may noght be seye [seen], and he seyde they were angeles of God and that place is Paradys that God graunted [provided good things] to hym that beleved, when He sayde thus: *Dabo vobis terram fluentem lac et mel.* That is to say: 'I shall gyve yow londe flowyng mylke and hony'.

And a lytel fro that place, on the lyft syde by the ryver of Fison, is a gret mervayle. Ther is a valeye bytwyxte two hilles that is 4 myle long. Som men calle hit the Valeye Enchaunted, and som men calle hit the Valey of Fendes [devils/monsters/enemies], and som men calle hit the Valey Perlous [Perilous]. And that valey beth many gret tempestes

and gret noyses and thondres every day and every nyght. This valey is all full of develes and hath y-be allway [has always been]. And men say ther that hit is an entré to Helle. In this valey is moche goold and sylver, wherfore many Cristen men and other gooth theder for covetyse [to be greedy], to have of that goold and sylver. But fewe of hem cometh out agayn, for they beth anoon [soon] astrangled with fendes.

And in the myddel of that valeye uppon a roch is a visage and the heed of the devel bodylich, ryght hydous and dredful to se. And ther is nothyng y-sene but the hede to the shuldres, but ther is no man in the worlde, Cristen ne other, so hardy but that he sholde have gret drede to se hit. And his eyen beth so staryng and sprynchlynge of [bespeckled with] fire of diverse coloures and he chaungeth so ofte his contenaunce that no man der [dare] come nye [near] hym for all the worldes good. And out of his mouth and his nose cometh gret plenté of fyre. But alway a good Cristen man that is stable in his feith may go thorghout that valey wel ynow [now] withoute harme, if he be clene y-shryve [well confessed] and blesse hym with the signe of the crosse.

And when my felawes [companions] and Y were in that valey we had ful gret drede and som of myn felawes acorded to go that way and som noght. And ther were in oure company 2 freres menoures [Friars Preachers] of Lumbardye, and they sayde if eny of us wolde go theryn they wolde also. And then uppon trist [trust] of hem [them] we sayde that we wolde go. And we leet synge [sung] a Messe, and were y-shryve [confessed] and houseled [given communion], and so went we yn 14. And when we come out we were but 10, and wiste [we learnt] noght whoder [whether] oure felawes were y-lost other [or] turned agen [turned back], for we saw no more of hem. And som of oure felawes that wolde noght go yn with us went aboute by another way and were ther byfore us.

And we say [saw] many wonder syghtes in that valey: goold, sylver, precious stones, gret plenté as us [we] thoughte. But whether hit was as we semed [it seemed to us] we wyte [learnt] noght, for Y touched none. For the fendes beth so sotel [subtle] that they make many tyme thynges to seme other then they ben. And we were ofte y-cast adoun into the erthe with wynde and thondre and tempestes. But God halpe us alway and so that we passed thorgh the valey withoute harm, thanked be Our Lord God.

And byyonde that valey is a gret ile wher that peple ben as gret as gyauntes [giants] of 28 other 30 foot longe. And they have no clothyng but beestes skynnes. And tho ete no breed but raw flessh, and drynketh mylke, and they eteth gladloker [more gladly] flessh of men than of other. And men sayde that byyonde that yle was another yle wher beth gretter gyauntz, for they beth of 45 other 50 foot longe,

and som seyde of 50 cubites longe, but Y sey hem noght.

And another ile is ther wher ben wicked and lither [evil] wymmen. And tho [they] have stones in her eyen [eyes], and tho han [are of] soch a kynde that if they byholdeth any man with wrathe, they sleeth [slay] hym with her lokynge [gaze].

Another ile is ther of faire peple, wher the custome is soche that the ferste nyght that they ben y-wedded they telleth that hit is y-ordeyned therto a man, and let hym lye by her wyves to have her maydenhode [virginity].[68] And they geve hym gret hire [pay] for his travayle [work]. And thilke men ben called *gadlybriens*. For men of that contré holden hit a gret peryle to have a wommanis maydenhod. And if hit be so that her hosbande fynde her a mayde when he cometh to her, the hosband shal playne hym [complain] to the lawe that he hath noght do his dever [completed his duty], and he shal be gryvouslich [grievously] pursued. After oon [one] nyght they kepen her wyves well, that they speke noght with thilke [that] man.

And Y asked what was the cause why they had that costome [custom], and they seyde somtyme men lay by her wyves ferst, and som of tho wyves had eddres [snakes] in her bodies that touched her hosbandes yerd [penis] in her bodyes. So were many men slayn. Therefore leet thay other men have her maydenhode for drede of deth, or [lest] thei put hemself in aventure [danger].

Another ile is ther wher they chesen [elect] the kyng and they chesen hym noght for his rychesse ne for his nobleye, but he that is of good condiciouns [character] and most ryghtwys [righteous] and trywest [fair] to juge every man of his trespas, litel other [or] mochel [much], riche other poore. And that kyng may do no man to deth withoute conseil [counsel] of his barons and that they alle be assent therto. And if hit be so that the kyng do a gret trespas, as to sle [slay] a man other soch another, he shal be dede. But he shal noght be slayne, but they shal defende and forbede that no man be so hardy to make hym companye, and nother speke with hym, nother come to hym, ne gyve hym no mete ne drynke, and thus he shal deighe.

In this lond and many other of Inde beth many cocthrylles [crocodiles], that is a maner of a long eddre [snake]. And on the nyght they dwell in wateres, and uppon the day in the londe amonge roches [rocks]. These eddres sleeth [kill] men and eteth hem gryntynge [to bits], and they have no tonge.

In this contré and many other, they sowen the seed of coton every yer. And hit groweth as hit were smale trees and bereth coton.

In Arabye beth many bryddes [birds] and som men callen hem gyrsaunt [giraffe], that is a wel fayr beest, and hit is heyer [higher] than a gret courser [horse] other a stede, but his necke is neygh 20 cubites longe, and his cruper [hindquarters] and his tayle is lyke to an

hert [deer] and he may loke over an high hous. And ther beth many camelions [chameleons], that is a lytel beest that eteth ne drynketh never. And he changeth his coloures ofte, for somtyme he is of oo[n] colour and somtyme of another. And he may chaunge hym into alle colouris but blak and reed. And ther beth many wilde swyn [swine] of many colouris, and as gret as an oxe, and hy [they] beth all splotted as hit were founes [fawns]. And ther beth lyons al white, and ther beth other beestes as gret as stedes that men callen lonhorauns [rhinos], and som men call hem tontys. And they beth blake [black], and they have 3 long hornes in her front as sheryng [cutting] as a sharp swerd, and he chasseth and sleeth [slayeth] the olyfaunt [elephant]. And ther beth many other beestes.

And ther is another gret ile and plenteuous where beth good men and trywe [true] and of good lyff [life] after her feith. And though they be noght Cristen, yit of lawe of kynde they beth full of good vertues. And they fleeth alle vices of synnes and of malis, for they beth noght envyous, ne proute, ne covetous, ne glotons, nother lechours. And they do to no man but as they wolde they dede [did] to hym. And they fulfelleth the 10 Commaundementes. They make noon fors [take no account] of no rychesse. They swereth noght but ye and nay, for they say tho [they] that swereth, he wole bygyle [deceive] his neyghbore. And som calle this ile Bragme, and som men calle hit the Ile of Feith.[69] And thorgh this yle renneth a gret ryver, the which men calle Tebe. And generallich [generally] alle men in this yle and other neygh [lands nearby] beth ryght trewe, and trewer and ryghtwyser [more righteous] than in another contré.

In this ile ben none thefes, none morthereres [murderers], nother comen wymmen [prositutes], no lechoures, ne beggeres. And for they beth so trywe and so good, ther is no tempest, ne no werre [war], no hunger, ne none other tribulacioun. And so hit semeth wel that God loveth hem, and that He is wel apayed [pleased] of her levynge [living]. And they leven so honestyle [modestly] in mete and drynke that they lyven ryght longe, and many of hem deyen withoute sycknesse, for kynde fayleth hem for ylde [because their natural constitutions fail them when they are older].

And Kyng Alisaundre sende somtyme thider for to wynne that londe, and they sende hym letteres agayn and seyde thus: ‘What is ynow to a man that all the worlde may noght suffyse? Thow shalt fynde nothyng in us why thow sholdest werre [make war] on us, when we have no rychesse nother tresour, and all the catel and goodes of our contré ben in comune. Our mete and our drynke is our tresour and rychesses. And instede of goold and sylver, we have pees [peace] and acorde and good lyff alone. And we have but oon cloth uppon us, and our wyves beth noght araed [arrayed] rychely to pleysyng of men, for

we hold hit a gret foly a man to dyght [arrange] his body to make hym seme fayrere than hit is. We have evermore y-be [been] in pees til now that thow wylt desert [take from] us. We have a kyng among us, noght for lawe ne for demyng [damning] of no man, for ther is no trespas among us, but al onlich [only] to lere [teach] us and to be obedient to hym. And so myght thow noght take noght fro us but our good pees'.[70] And when Kyng Alisaunder saw this letter, he thoughte that he sholde do moche harm if he sturbled [disturbed] hem, and so he sende to hem that they sholde kepe wel her good maners and have no drede of hym.

Another ile ther is that is y-called Synople, wher also beth good peple and trywe and ful of good feith, and beth moch lyke of lyveng to the peple byforesayde. And they goth all naked. And into that ile com Kyng Alisaundre, and when he saw her good feith and trywe, he sayde he wolde do hem no harme, and bade hem asken of hym what they wolde have. And they answered that they had rychesse ynow when they had mete and drynke to susteyne her bodyes. And they seyde the rychesse of the worlde is noght [naught] worth. But if hit were so that he myght graunte hem that they sholde never deye, of that they wolde pray hym. And Kyng Alisaundre seyde he myght noght do that, for he was dedelych [mortal] hymself and sholde deye as they sholde.

Then sayde they, 'Why art thow so proute and woldest wynne all the worlde and have in thyn subjeccioun as hit [as though you] were a god, and thow hast no terme [end] of thyn lyf? And thow wolt have all the rychasse of the worlde, which shal forsake thee or thow forsake hit. And thow shalt bere noght with thee, but hit shal by leve [be left] byhynde thee to other. But as thow were y-bore naked, thow shalt be y-do [die] yn erthe'. And so Kyng Alisaundre was gretly astoned of this aunswer.[71]

Although hit be so that they have noght alle the articles of our feith, yit Y trowe [trust] that God love hem neverthelasse for her good purpoos, and that they take her the same degré as He dide of Jope [Job] that was a paynem [pagan], the which He helde hym for His triwe servaunt, and many other. And Y trowe that God loveth all thilke [those] that loveth Hym and serveth Hym meckly [meekly] and trywly, and despised vaynglory of the worlde as thes men dide, and as Jope dyde.

[…]

And another ile is ther which they calle Pytan. Men of this ile tylyeth [till] no corn lond, for they ete noght. And they ben smale men, but noght so smale as ben pigmans [pygmies]. These men lyven with the smel and savour of wild apples. And when they goth fer out

of contré they berith apples with hem, for also sone as they leveth the savour of the apples they deye. And they ben noght ful resonable, but as bestes. And then is another ile wher the peple ben all in fetheris as bryddes [birds], but [except] the faces and the palmes of her hondes [hands]. These men goth as well uppon the see as uppon the londe. And they eten flessh all raw. In this ile is a gret ryver that is two myle brod and an half, that men called Ranymar.

And byyende [beyond] that is a gret wyldernesse, as men sayn that han be [have been] ther, in the which men sayn ben trees of the sonne and of the mone that spake to Kyng Alisaundre and told hym of his dedes [deeds]. And men sayn that peple that kepith thes trees and eteth of the fruyt, they lyven 400 other 500 yeres, thorgh myght [power] of that fruyt. And we wold have go theder, but Y trowe 100,000 men of armes sholde noght passe that wyldernesse for wylde bestes, as dragones and other.

In this yle beth many olyfauntz white and blew withoute nombre, unicornes, and lyons of many coloures. Many other yles beth in the lond of Prester John that were to longe to telle, and ther is myche rychesse and many precious stones.

*Why he is y-cliped [called] Prester John. Capitulum Vicesimum Secundum. [Chapter 22]*

I trowe [trust] som of yow [you] have y-herd telle whi he is y-called Prester John, but for tho that wyte [know] noght, Y shal say. Ther was somtyme an emperour that was a noble prince and a doughty, and he hadde many Cristen knyghtes with hym. And this emperour thought he wolde y-se the maner of Cristen men and the servise in cherche of Cristen men. And tho [there] was Christendome and Cristen cherches in Turkye, Surry [Syria], Tartarye, Jerusalem, Palestyne, Araby, and all the lond of Egypte. And this emperour come with a Cristen knyght into a cherche of Egipte uppon the Saturday uppon Witsoneday, when the bysshope makyde orders [ordained priests], and he byheld the servise. And he asked of the knyght what peple tho sholde be that stood byfore the bysshope. And the knyght seyde tho sholde be prestes. And tho he seyde he wolde no more be called ‘kyng’, ne ‘emperour’, but ‘prest’. And also he wolde have the name of hym that come out ferst at the dore of the prestes, which man was y-called John. And so he wold be called ‘Prester John’, and so haveth all the emperoures sithe [since] be y-called.

In that lond ben Cristen men of good feith, and they have prestes to syng her Masse, and they make her sacrament as men of Grece doth. But they say noght so many thinges as our prestes doth, for they say noght but as the aposteles, Seynt Petre and Seynt Thomas and

other, sayde. When they synge Messes, they seith ferst *Pater Noster* and the wordes which Goddes body is makid with. For we have many addiciouns which that popes han [have] y-ordeynd, which men of that contré knoweth not.

And more estward beth two yles. That oon is y-called Orrel and that other is y-called Argete, of wham all the lond is myne of goold and sylver. In this ile men may se none sterres [stars] cler shynyng but a sterre that is y-called Canapos. And ther men may noght se the mone but in the laste quarter.

In that ile is a gret hille of goold that pismeres [ants] kepeth, and they fynyth [refine] the goold. And the pismeres beth as gret as houndes her, so that no man may come ther for drede of hem, so that men may gete of that goolde but by queyntise [cunning]. Therfore when hit is ryght warme tho pismeres hideth hem in the erthe fro undre of the day [morning] to none [noon], and then men of the countré take camellys and dromaderyes and other bestes, and goo theder and charge [load] theym with golde and go awey fast or the pissmyres come oute of the erthe. And other tymes whan it is nat so hote, that the pissmyres hyde them nat, they take meres that have foles, and they lay upon these meres two vesselles as it were two smale barelis tome [empty barrels] and the mouthe upwardes and dryve theym theder [thither], and holden their foles at home. And whan the pyssmyres sene theyse vesselles, for they have of kynde [an instinct] to leve nothynge tome [empty], they fylle these vesselles of golde. And whan men trowe [know] that the vesselles ar full, they take the foles and brynge theym as nere as they dare, and they whyne and the meres here theym. And as sone they come to ther foles, and so men take the gold so than [then]. For these pyssemyres woll suffre bestes to goo amonge theym but no men.

Beyonde the iles of the lond of Prester John and his lordship of wyldernesse, to goo right est men shall nat fynde but hylles, great roches, and other myrke [dark] londe where no man may see on day ne on nyght, as men of the countéé say. And this wyldernes and myrke londe lasteth to Paradyse Terrestre where Adam and Eve were sette, but they were there but a lytell whyle. And that is towarde the est [east] at begynnynge of the erthe, but that is nat oure est that we call where the sonne rysethe in those countrees towarde Paradyse. Than it is mydnight in oure countré, for the roundnesse of the erthe. For Oure Lord made the erthe all rounde in myddes [the centre] of firmament [the heavens].

Of Paradyse can I nat speke propirly for I have nat be there, and that angoreth me. But that I have herde I shal say you. Men say that Paradyse Terrestre is the hyghest londe of the worlde, and it so high that it toucheth nere to the sercle of the mone, for it is so highe that

Noes flode myght nat come therto, the whyche covered all the erthe aboute. And this Paradyse Terrestre is enclosed all aboute with a walle, and that wall is all covered with mosse, as it semethe that men may se no stone ne nothynge ellis [else] wherof it is. And the hyghest place of Paradyse, in the mydes [middle] of it, is one wall that casteth oute the foure flodes [rivers] that renne thorowe dyvers londes. The first flode is called Physon or Ganges, and that renneth [runs] thorough Ynde. In that ryver are many precious stones and moche *lignum aloes* and gravell of golde.[72] Another is called Nylus or Gyron, and that rennethe thorough Ethiope and Egypt. The thirde is called Tygre, and that renneth thorough Assary and Ermony the Grete. And the forth is called Eufrates, that renneth thorough Assary and Ermony the Grete. And the forth is called Eufrates, that rennethe thorough Ermony and Persy. And men say that all the swete and fresshe water of the world take theyr springynge of theym.

The first ryver is called Physon: that is to say a gaderynge of many ryvers togeder and falle into that ryver. And som call it Canges, for a kynge that was in Ynde that men called Tangeras, for it renneth thorough hys lond. And this ryvere is in som place clere, in som place troble [murky], in som place hote, in som place colde. The secounde ryvere is called Nylus or Gyron, for it is ever troble. For Gyron is to say 'troble'. The forth ryver is called Eufrates, that is to say 'well brennynge', for there groweth many god thynges upon the ryver.[73]

And ye shall understonde that no man lyvynge may go unto that Paradyse. For by land he may nat go for wylde bestes which ar in the wyldernes, and for hylles and roches where no man may passe. Ne by those ryvers may no man passe, for they come with so greate course and so great wawes [waves] that no shyp may go ne sayle ageyne theym. Many greate lordes have asayed [tried] many tymes to go by those ryvers to Paradyse, but they myght nat spede [succeed] in there wey. For som dyed for wery [weariness] of rowynge, som wex blynde, and som deefe for noyse of the waters. So no man may passe there but thorough special grace of God.

And for I can tell you no more of that place I shall say you of that I have sene in these Iles of the londe of Prester John, and they ar under erthe to us. And other iles ar there, whoso wolde pursue them, for to environ [encircle] the erthe whoso had grace of God to holde the wey, he myght come right too the same countrees that he were come of and come fro, and so go aboute the erthe. And for it were to [too] longe tyme and also many perylles too pas, fewe men assay to go so, and yet might be done.

And therfore men came fro these iles to other iles coostynge of [belonging to] the lordshyp of Prester John. And men come in the comynge to one ile that men call Cassoy. And that countré is nere

sexty journes longe, and more than 50 of brede [breadth]. That is the best londe that is in those countrees save Chatay. And if marchauntes come theder as comonly as they do unto Chatay it shuld be better than Chatay, for it is so thyk of cytees and townes that whan a man gothe oute of a cyté he seth as sone another on eche syde. There is greate plenté of spyces and other godes [goods]. The kynge of this yle is full ryche and myghty, and he holdeth his londe of the Great Chane, for that is one of the 12 provynces that the Great Chane hath under hym withoute [outside] his owne londe.

## John of Hildesheim, History of the Three Kings

*Date:* Before 1375

*[John of Hildesheim was a German Carmelite friar who journeyed throughout Europe, but who is most famous for his penning of the present text describing the story of the Three Magi in the Far East. The connection between the Three Magi and Prester John is one that goes back to the very origins of the legend, and can be seen espoused even in the first mention of Prester John in Otto of Freising 's chronicle.[74] The present text was originally in Latin, but once again an early English text is reproduced here, chiefly because no critical edition of the Latin text has yet appeared. As with the previous text, it will be helpful to remember that 'd' can stand in for 'th'; 'u' and 'v' are interchangeable; and 'y' and 'i'are interchangeable.]*

[The three magi, after visiting Christ in the manger, return to the East, and later St Thomas comes and converts them to Christianity.]

Than these thre kynges archebysshoppes and other bysshoppes of comyn [common] assent of all the people chose an other man that was dyscrete to be lord and gouernour of all the people in temporalte. And for this cause that yf ony [any] man wolde ryse or tempte agaynst the patryarke Thomas or agaynst that lawe of god yf so were that the patryarke myght not rule hym by the spyrytuall lawe, than sholde this lorde of temporall lawe chastyse hym by his power. So this lorde sholde not be called a kynge or emperour, but he sholde be called Preter Johan. And the cause is this. For the thre kynges were preestes and of theyr possessyons they made hym lorde. For there is no degree so hygh as preesthode is in all the worlde, nor so worthy. Also he is called Preter Johan in worshyp of saynt Johan theuangelyst [the evangelist] that was a preest the moost specyall chosen and loued of god almyghty. Whan all this was done these thre kynges assygned the patryarke Thomas and Preter Johan, that one to be chefe gouernour in

spyrytualte, and that other to be chefe lorde in temporalte for euermore. And so these same lordes and gouernours of Inde ben [are] called unto these dayes.

[…]

Ferthermore touchynge the sectes of heretykes aforesayd …

Also there is an other secte that is of the kyngdome of Taars [Tartars] and of the yle of Egryswyll [?] there as Jaspar [one of the Three Kings] was kynge, and they ben called Nestorini. And they ben the worste and the cursedest heretykes of the worlde, and for the moost parte they ben blacke ethyopyes. And all men of other sectes hate them gretly. And whan the preestes go to synge masse they curse all men that were of counseyle or helpynge to doo awaye the body of Jaspar that was theyr kynge. Ferthermore these Nestorynes forsoke Prester Johan and Thomas theyr patryarke and were rebell agaynst them and agaynst the lawes of holy chirche. So afterwarde as the wyll of god was on a tyme there dyde aryse in the same londe a grete multytude of people, as of shepcherdes and labourers and bonde men agaynst theyr owne nacyons, the whiche called themselfe Tartarynes [Tartars], and they made a smyth they capytayne and chefe lorde. And so thrugh stronge power they destroyed all that kyngdome and londes of Nestorynes, and slewe all the people without ony mercy as the wyll of god was, and toke castelles, cytees, and grete townes and all theyr goodes. And whan the Tartarynes had thus conquered the londes and kyngdomes of the Nestorynes, than that Nestorynes yede [went] to Preter Johan and promysed hym that they wolde tourne agayne to theyr fyrst lawe and fayth of god and be trybutory to hym so that he wolde helpe them. And than Preter Johan was in good wyll to helpe them. The nexte nyght as Preter Johan laye in his bedde and slepte the thre kynges appered to hym, and spake to hym, and charged hym that he sholde not in no maner helpe ne socour the Nestoryns, for it is goddes wyll that they sholde utterly be destroyed for theyr wyckednes and malyce. And whan the Nestorynes herde tell that Preter Johan had suche a vysyon of the thre kynges, they yede [went] aboute to the grete lordes that were aboute Preter Johan and gaue them grete gyftes to speke to theyr lord that they myght haue helpe of hym. And than dyuers lordes counseyled Preter Johann to take no hede of dremes nor of suche vysyons, but to holde his purpose and promes [promise] and to helpe these Nestorynes. And than Preter Johan assented to theyr counseyle, and sent his eldest sone Dauyd with a stronge hoost in helpynge of the Nestorines. And whan these two hoostes mette togyder, the Tartarynes had the vyctory, and slewe Dauyd and all his hoost, so that there escaped none alyue. And also

they destroyed many londes, cytees and castelles that were longynge to Preter Johan. And whan Preter Johan herde therof than he was sory therfore that he dyde agaynst the commaundement of the thre kynges that appered to hym in his slepe. And than with grete sorowe of herte he asked god mercy and forgyuenesse, and the thre kynges he prayed of grace and helpe. Than on a tyme the thre kynges appered to the Emperour of Tartaryne as he laye in his bedde and charged hym that he sholde do no more harme to Preter Johan. And [that] he sholde sende to hym and make a fynall peas with hym for euermore, but the londes and castelles that themperour had wonne of Preter Johan to kepe them styll to hymselfe, for bycause Preter Johan was inobedyent to our commaundement. Than the emperour anone [anon; later] though he were a paynym [pagan], yet he was fore adradde [afraid] of his vysyon. Anone he sente messengers to Preter Johan and made a fynall peas bytwene them for euermore. In soo moche that the eldest sone of these two lordes sholde wedde the others doughter euermore after, to the worldes ende, and so it is yet contynued unto this daye.[75] So afterwarde this Emperour enquyred of the thre kynges and of theyr lyues [lives] and dedes [deeds]. Than in mynde and in worshyp of them the emperour orderned that his fyrst sone and all the chyldren of his successours shold bere the names of these thre kynges for euermore after. And thus the Nestorynes were destroyed and put out of theyr londes and kyngdomes. And afterwarde were fugytyfe and dwellynge aboute in dyuers countrees alwaye under trybute as Jewes and other nacyons that ben alwaye dwellynge under trybute. But yet some of them dwelle in the yle of Egyrswyll, and paye therfore euery yere grete trybute.

Also there is an other secte that is called Indy, and they ben of Preter Johans londe, and they ben good crysten men. And the preestes of that londe whan they go to masse they hange a crowne of golde on the awter, and the preest deaken and subdeaken mete togyder in thre partyes, and so they goo to the awter. And this they do in tokenynge [token] of the thre kynges that mette sodeynly togyder in an hyewaye, which was departed [divided] in thre wayes, and so thrugh ledynge of the sterre they yede [went] unto Bedleem [Bethlehem] and offred gyftes to god almyghty the .xij. [twelfth] daye after his byrth.

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1 This is, of course, the *Prester John Letter,* and particularly Interpolation B or C. See pp. 67–91.

2 This text has been mentioned in several of the previous texts, for which see above p. 132, n.44.

3 Nur al-Diīn, atabeg of Aleppo (1146–74) and Damascus (1156–74), who was one of the most powerful enemies of the Latins in the third quarter of the twelfth century. Alberic may here be mistaking Nur al-Dīn for his father ‘Imād al-Dīn Zangi,

whose conquest of Edessa in 1144 was the instigation for the Second Crusade.

[4] Much of this and the next paragraph are lifted straight from Honorius' letter, which is printed above on pp. 124–5.

[5] See n.3 above

[6] Probably an echo of the *Relatio de Davide* cycle of texts.

[7] Possibly Urgench? See Donald Ostrowski, 'City Names of the Western Steppe at the Time of the Mongol Invasion', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London,* vol. 61, no.3 (1998), pp. 465–75, here pp. 472–3

[8] Avignia (and various spelling variants) is a European designation for Georgia.

[9] Marcian, eastern Roman emperor from 450 to 457

[10] Donald Ostrowski, 'Second-Redaction Additions in Carpini's *Ystoria Mongalorum*', in Frank E. Sysyn (ed.), *Adelphotes: A tribute to Omeljan Pritsak by his Students* (Cambridge, Mass., 1989), pp. 522–50; Keagan Brewer, *Wonder and Skepticism in the Middle Ages* (forthcoming, September 2015), chapter 7.

[11] In this instance, we can reasonably identify King David as Toghrul Beg, leader of the Kereits, often known by his title Ong Khan, and this renders the story Simon gives here accurate in essence.

[12] This is a reference to the Mongol military group of 10,000 men known as a *tümen,* which was indeed organised on such a structure.

[13] The story of Chingis Khan taking to wife one of Prester John's daughters becomes common from this point on, and it is only slightly off the mark. If we identify Prester John here as Toghrul, which is convincing given the story, then the story of the daughter being taken to wife must refer to Sorghaghtani Beki, youngest daughter of Toghrul's younger brother, who was married off to Chingis Khan's son Tolui. She was a Nestorian Christian, and later became one of the most influential women in the Mongol political structure, as well as becoming mother of later khans Möngke, Hulegu, Ariq Böke, and Kublai.

[14] Simeon Rabban Ata was a Syriac Nestorian ecclesiastic who acted as a bridge between the Mongols and Christianity both eastern and western. Simon of St Quentin and Simeon Rabban Ata met in Tabriz in Iran in 1245.

[15] William is here confusing the Turkic terms *khan* (emperor) with *qam* (soothsayer/diviner). Coirchan, i.e. gürkhan, is not a name at all; it is a title meaning 'chief khan'. In fact, there was no gürkhan of the Mongols in 1098, when the Franks captured Antioch, so this is an error of fact.

[16] William is here referring to the *Chanson d'Antioche,* a well-known source for the First Crusade. The *Chanson* describes a Corbahan as the chief Saracen villain, and this is presumably who William has taken for Coirchan. In reality, the Corbahan character was a highly fictionalised representation of one of the primary Muslim figures who fought against the First Crusaders: Kerbogha, Atabeg of Mosul. In reality, he had nothing to do with the Mongols. See Susan B. Edgington and Carol Sweetenham (trans.), *The Chanson d'Antioche: An Old French Account of the First Crusade* (Farnham, 2011), §241–2, pp. 241–2.

[17] Three of Chingis Khan's grandsons: Sartaq, Khan of the Golden Horde briefly in 1256; Möngke, Great Khan from 1251–59, and Güyük, Great Khan from 1246–8. Sartaq and Möngke, in particular, were open-minded towards religious plurality.

[18] i.e. Andrew of Longjumeau, one of the many missionaries sent by Pope Innocent IV to evangelise the Mongols in the 1240s.

[19] Unc or Unc Can is the Mongolian title Ong Khan ('king' or 'emperor', equivalent of the Chinese *wàng)*. The leader in question was named Toghrul, khan of the Keraits, a Mongolic tribe of Nestorian Christian religion that was one of the first groups to be conquered and incorporated by Chingis Khan.

[20] See p. 158, n.13 above on Sorghaghtani Beki.

[21] i.e. the country watered by the Orkhon and Kherlen rivers in Mongolia.

[22] This is correct. When the Uighur leader Barchukh submitted to the Mongols in 1209, Chingis Khan gave him his daughter Altani. See Thomas T. Allsen, 'The Yuan Dynasty and the Uighurs in Turfan', *China Among Equals: the Middle Kingdom and its Neighbours: 10th–14th Centuries* (London, 1983), p. 246

[23] Derived from the old Turkic name for the Volga River *(Itil* or *Atil)*

[24] See above p. 162, n.15.

[25] See above p. 162, n.16.

[26] See above p. 132, n.15 on William of Rubruck's misinterpretation of *qam* for *khan.*

[27] See p. 163, n.19.

[28] St Denis is now a suburb in the north of Paris.

[29] This is the by now familiar attribution of Prester John to Toghrul, whose title was Ong Khan, usually given by western authors as Unc Can, here Unach Khan.

[30] Probably a rendering of Jürchen. See Paul Pelliot, *Notes on Marco Polo* (Paris, 1959–63), 3 vols, here vol. 1, no.161, pp. 366–90

[31] For Ong Khan, see p. 163, n.36. The translation 'the great lord' for Ong is reasonably accurate.

[32] Chingis Khan, after defeating Toghrul (i.e. Ong Khan), gave Toghrul's niece to his son Tolui. The story here, like much of Marco Polo's text, is embellished.

[33] i.e. Tangut, also known as the Western Xià, a sovereign state centred on what are now the western Chinese provinces of Gānsú and Níngxià. See Pelliot, *Notes on Marco Polo,* vol. 2, no.358, pp. 849–51, i.e. Tangut. Tangut is actually the name of a people, not a place, but this confusion on Marco's part comes to permeate many of the early modern sources that later attempted to unravel Prester John's origins.

[34] A number of hypotheses exist about Caagiu, but none are entirely convincing. Although the exact nature of Chingis Khan's death is something of a mystery, it is unlikely that Marco Polo's account is accurate. See Paul Pelliot, *Notes on Marco Polo,* vol. 1, no.88, pp. 114–5

[35] See note 33 above

[36] This George is a corruption of Korgiz, who was a leader of the Ongut Mongol tribe, and a close ally of Kublai Khan's. The Onguts were a Nestorian Christian tribe, hence the association with Prester John. Later, John of Montecorvino claims to have converted Korgiz to Catholicism in Beijing, as described in the following text, on p. 189.

[37] This refers to the Hmong people, who were called Arytm by the Persians. Marco is mistaken in saying that Aryun means 'half-breed'. See Pelliot, *Notes on Marco Polo,* vol. 1, no.3–3, pp. 47–51

[38] In medieval Christian tradition, Gog and Magog were two Satanic tribes of the Far East whom Alexander the Great enclosed behind a giant mountain gate in order to stay their hunger for death. It was believed that they would be released from this prison upon Christ's second coming. The Mongols were often equated with Gog and Magog by ecclesiastical writers in the thirteenth century.

[39] Modern Línfén, near Xfī'ān in China's Shānxī province, now one of the most polluted cities in the world. See Pelliot, *Notes on Marco Polo,* vol. 2, no.314, p. 803

[40] Pelliot *(Notes on Marco Polo,* vol. 1, no.94, pp. 122–4) identifies this as Chieh-Chou (modern Jīchōu in northeastern Shānxī), but this is north-east of Pianfu, from which Marco said he went west. Given the subsequent description of riches and portraits of royalty, I feel it more likely Marco went to Yínchuān, which was the capital of the Tangut empire, also known as the Western Xia or *xīxià,* before the Mongols conquered it. Momentous royal tombs still survive there. Marco's Caiciu could be a rendering of *xīxià* or perhaps even *xīcháo* ('western dynasty'). Pelliot

could not have known of the tombs at Yínchuān, as the modern rediscovery of these tombs was made after his death in the 1940s.

41 The King of Gold is a literal rendering of the title for the *Altun khan,* the leader of the Jīn Dynasty, *jīn* being Chinese for gold. In any case, this story strays far from the facts, for which see Rene Grousset, *Empire of the Steppes* (Paris, 1970), pp. 257–9

42 Pelliot identifies this as Sūzhōu, in Jiāngsū province: *Notes on Marco Polo,* vol. 2, no. 245, p. 838

43 Pelliot identifies this as P'ei-chou (= modern Tàizhōu in Jiāngsū?): *Notes on Marco Polo,* vol. 2, no,315, p. 804

44 Caramoran is *Qara Mörān,* an ancient Mongolic name for the Chinese river Huāng Hé or Yellow River. The Huāng Hé does begin in the land Marco identified with Prester John, but the river he was crossing near Sūzhōu was in fact the Cháng Jiāng, known to Westerners as the Yangtze, not the Huāng Hé. See Pelliot, *Notes on Marco Polo,* vol. 1, no.121, pp. 182–3

45 i.e. Kaidu, thirteenth-century leader of the Chagatai khanate, and a great-grandson of Chingis Khan. Kaidu was at war with Kublai and his sons for most of his life as part of a larger dynastic dispute and power struggle. In 1277, he attacked the capital Karakorum as Marco narrates here. This story is therefore based loosely in fact. See Michal Biran, *Qaidu and the Rise of the Independent Mongol State in Central Asia* (New York, 1997), pp. 39–13

46 Kublai Khan's fourth son, Nomokhan.

47 Korgiz was in fact involved with repulsing Kaidu at Karakorum in 1277.

48 Kaidu's headquarters were indeed in Transoxiana after he conquered it in the 1260s.

49 See p. 181, n.36.

50 Reading *secta* ('sect'), as opposed to the edition's *septa* ('surrounding')

51 *Chapelle* here could mean several things: a crown, a breastplate, a helmet, a wreath, a hat, a tent, a cabinet, or a portable chapel. Indeed, there is conflicting information: where *d'escarlate* (of scarlet) suggests a fabric, *entailler* (carved, notched) suggests a metal.

52 For Gog and Magog, see above, footnote on p. 182, n.38.

53 Cosan = Koshang, which was the capital of the Ongut tribe of the Mongolians. This city was located probably in either of the modern Chinese provinces of Inner Mongolia or Shanxï, but the exact site remains unidentified. See Tjalling H.F. Halbertsma, *Early Christian Remains of Inner Mongolia* (Leiden, 2008), pp. 150–7

54 This appears to be a confusion of the commonly circulating story that Chingis Khan, upon defeating Prester John, took his daughter as wife, which was initially based on the story of Sorghaghtani Beki, for which see p. 158, n.13.

55 The tradition of Prester John's daughter being always married to the Mongol Great Khan derives from the story of Sorghaghtani Beki, for which see above footnote 13 on p. 158.

56 A mythical eastern land of the encyclopedic traditions.

57 Presumably a reference to Hermes Trismegistus, for whom see Florian Ebeling, David Lorton (trans.), *The Secret History of Hermes Trismegistus* (New York, 2011)

58 See p. 158, n.13.

59 The latter echoes the *Prester John Letter,* for which see above p. 68.

60 Borrowed from the *Prester John Letter,* above on pp. 73–4.

61 See *Prester John Letter,* above on p. 78.

62 Susa in modern Iran. See *Prester John Letter,* above on p. 84.

63 Mastic, a close relative of the pistachio, has a strong aroma and is produced

on the Greek island Chios. It is now used for its scent in furniture varnish and chewing gum. In Mandeville's context, it was an exotic eastern product.

64 Cf. *Prester John Letter,* see above p. 80.

65 Cf. *Prester John Letter,* see above p. 80.

66 Nisa in modern Turkmenistan; see *Prester John Letter,* see above pp. 80, 83–5.

67 Catholonabeus: a corruption of Hasan-i Sabbāh, leader of the Assassins in the twelfth century. See Ana Pinto, *Mandeville's Travels: A Pihla in Disguise* (Madrid, 2005), pp. 60–64

68 i.e. there is a man whom they pay to have intercourse with the newlywedded wife, as opposed to the husband. This is a reference to the fabled *jus primae noctis,* a practice that is sometimes thought, falsely, to have occurred in Europe in the Middle Ages.

69 i.e. the Bragmanni of the *Prester John Letter,* i.e. the Brahmins; see above on pp. 78, 80.

70 Deriving from the tradition of Alexander the Great's letters, whose textual traditions are extremely complex: Richard Stoneman, 'Primary Sources from the Classical and Early Medieval Periods', in Z. David Zuwiyya (ed.), *Companion to Alexander Literature in the Middle Ages* (Leiden, 2011), pp. 1–20. A translation of these letters can be read in Andy Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies: Studies in the Monsters of the Beowulf Manuscript* (Cambridge, 1985), pp. 204–53

71 This rebuke is a part of the Alexander Legend with an early provenance: Michel Austin, 'Alexander and the Macedonian Invasion of Asia: Aspects of the Historiography of War and Empire in Antiquity', in Ian Worthington, *Alexander the Great: A Reader* (London, 2003), p. 130; originally published in John Rich and Graham Shipley (eds), *War and Society in the Greek World* (London, 1993), pp. 197–223

72 *Lignum aloes:* a type of dark hardwood native to south-east Asia of the genera *Aquilaria* and *Gyrinops* (not aloe vera), whose resin was in Mandeville's context an aromatic luxury product.

73 On the four rivers of paradise, see Genesis 2:10–14

74 For which, see above pp. 44–5.

75 See p. 158, n.13.

# Section 4 – Prester John in Africa (Fifteenth to Early Seventeenth Centuries)

*Prester John's translocation from Asia to Africa is often misunderstood. Early modern writers accused the Portuguese missionaries Pêro da Covilhã and Afonso de Paiva of being the first to associate Prester John with Ethiopia, but there are many indications before their mission of 1487 that Europeans already considered Prester John to be equivalent to the Ethiopian monarch. There exist at least eight letters prior to 1487 from European kings and popes to the Ethiopian emperor, calling him Prester John.[1] The earliest text known to mention Prester John in Ethiopia is a map which dates to more than a century and a half earlier than Pêro da Covilha's mission: the map of Giovanni da Carignano, dated c.1310, which was destroyed in the Second World War.[2] The earliest textual sources to definitively place Prester John in Ethiopia are from the 1320s/1330s, and another map of the 1330s also places him in Ethiopia, although it has been suggested that Jacques de Vitry may have associated Prester John with Ethiopia as early as 1217.[3]*

*It seems, then, that a concerted association between Prester John and Ethiopia had its beginnings in the early fourteenth century. Charles Beckingham convincingly argued that the genesis of this association between Prester John and Ethiopia can be found in an Ethiopian embassy to Europe around 1310.[4] This embassy aimed to garner military support for the Christian Ethiopian state, which was then being threatened by the Muslim Mamluks in Egypt. The thirty-man-strong delegation travelled to Rome, France, Spain, and Portugal. It is presumed that they created sufficient impression to translate Prester John from his prior Asian home to Ethiopia.*

**Bertrandon de la Broquière, The Voyage to Outremer**

*Date:* Travelled 1432–33; wrote 1457

*[Bertrandon de la Broquière was a Burgundian pilgrim who travelled to the*

*Holy Land in the 1430s, later penning an account of his travels from which the following is excerpted. Bertrandon heard these stories from another traveller, Peter of Naples, and a number of hints suggest that Peter associated Prester John with southern Africa. This is a quality example of the oral story-telling that underpinned much of the Prester John legend's transmission and evolution.]*

I found in this city of Pera[5] a Neapolitan from the city of Naples who was called Peter of №ples, who got married in the land of Prester John, so he told me. He strongly tempted me to go with him; whereupon I asked him about many things, which I have since put in writing. [i do not know] if he told me the truth or not; I am only reporting what he said, and do not make any guarantees.

Firsly, he told me that when he went to this aforesaid country of Prester John, he went with two men whom the lord of Berry sent there towards the aforesaid Prester John, that is to say one prosecutor and another man of low class, both of whom died two years ago, that is to say in the year 1430, and one of them was from spain and the other from the kingdom of France.

Likewise, he told me that when he went to the aforesaid country of Ethiopia, he also went through Alexandria and Cairo, journeying up the Nile for fifteen days, and then entering the sea.

Likewise, he told me that the aforesaid Prester John is a good Catholic and obedient to the Church of Rome and that he is a very great lord and that he possesses a very great country. And [he also said] that when he wishes to make an army, he gathers at least four million men. Am he told me that they are a people of great stature, and that they are neither white nor black, but are of a yellow-brown colour, and that they are a wise and virtuous people.

Likewise, he told me that he [Prester John] always makes war against a great lord who is next to his country, towards the rising sun, who they call Chinemachin, and we call him the Grand Khan.

Likewise, he told me that the aforesaid Prester John has twelve great lords around his country who pay him every year a certain number of slaves and gold and they are also like slaves to him.

Likewise, he told me that gold grows in the country of Ethiopia and that there is also an abundance of ginger there, and no other spices grow there. Am he told me that there are a great many strange beasts, such as lions, elephants, giraffes, unicorns, and also gorillas, which are like savage men, except that they have a tail which is two and a half feet long, and they are half black and half white. and indeed there are a great many other marvellous beasts there. of special note, he said that there is a snake there that is 150 arms long, and they are very dangerous beasts. And when they wish, they raise

their heads at least five fathoms high, and its body is as thick as the mast of a galley, and it carries a spur beneath its tail which, if it is carried to war, its enemy cannot stand a chance against it. And he told me that this lord does not have any ships, nor anyone who knows how to make them, and [he told me that] he [Peter] went there [to Istanbul] partly to find some.

Likewise, he told me that this great lord who they call Chinemachin has at least eight large ships, much larger than any which are in that area, and that in his land are found precious stones and spices and the other marvels of which Alexander tells.

Likewise, he told me that no one can go into this land via the sea, for several reasons: first, because the country is too long; another reason, because the current is so strong that no ship can go there nor approach the land towards the south; another reason, because the Northern Star cannot be seen there. Another thing he said was that in one part of this sea, the darkness is so great at all times that every ship which passes through there, as soon as it touches the darkness, it will never be heard from again.

And he said that this darkness also extends into his land, and that it is so thick that if there were two men there, standing one next to the other, they would not see each other. And he also told me that the highest mountains in the world are in this country of Ethiopia. I saw him buy some mirrors because he said that there were none there and that they cost two hyperpyrons here [in Pera], and he could sell them for five ducats or more down there.

Likewise, he told me that in that country, winter is from the month of May up to the month of September, and that it rains a lot there, and that wheat is sown in December and that grapes are harvested in February. And he told me that the country is very fertile with every kind of goods and food. And we say that precious stones come from that country, but he said that none are found there, but that they come from other countries, but one finds plenty of them in the country of that great lord Chinemachin, as was said. And he said that the river that passes through Cairo, which we call the Nile, they call the Gyon.[6] And he said that it comes from that country, passing in between two mountains, and he says this because one can find it written that it comes from the terrestrial paradise, just like the Tigris and the Eufrates which, saving the grace of those who say it, it is from there that all four [rivers] come. However, he said that the Nile passes between these two mountains and there is only one small river, and part of a great canyon. And near to this passage, Prester John has had two large towers constructed and a large chain from one side to the other, so that no one can see into that cave, because he said that people used to go in and that, after anyone went in, he would never

return. The cause of this, he told me, is that once one is inside it, one hears a very sweet song that makes you never want to leave. And he told me that he had been as far as that passage, but no one is allowed to go any further, and this was [a rule] the aforesaid Prester John put in place because he did not know whether they were going either to hell or to paradise. and he told me that you could easily hear the aforesaid singing. and he also told me that if it pleased Prester John, he could easily move the river to another course. But he left it be because there are many Christians living on the aforesaid River Nile.

Likewise, he said that when he [Prester John] has four or five children, he orders them to be raised in a country he possesses, enclosed by many high mountains. and when they come to the age of rationality, the most devoted and well-conditioned of them is the one who will become lord after his father. and the others live in that country of many delights. and when they leave, they each wear a golden necklace to signify that they are not marked as lords. and this is so that the country will not be divided and so that the lordship will extend itself forever.

Likewise, he told me that from the time he went to the aforesaid country, he has seen four kingdoms conquered. and he also told me that when the aforesaid great lord Prester John rides horseback, he ensures that a cross is carried before him.[7]

Likewise, he told me that they baptise themselves as our lord was, in the river, and they say the same words that we do, except that they do not perform the same ceremonies as us, and say: 'I baptise you in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit'. and they have holy oil. and the marks that are made on their faces are made with a razor so that they can be more beautiful; and he said that they have done this from ancient times, and that Alexander made these marks on them the first time because they rebelled two or three times. And since then they have continued doing this.

Likewise, he told me that they say mass according to the Greek rite, as they celebrate the body of our Lord with leavened bread, but as for their words, they say the same things we say, but they do not say all the ceremonies. and he said that they gather together every Sunday. and he told me that every time one of their lords dies, he always orders his son to be forever obedient to the Pope of Rome.

## Francisco Álvares, True Information of the Lands of the Prester John of the Indies

*Date:* 1526/7

*[Francisco Álvares was part of the Portuguese embassy sent to Ethiopia in 1515. Throughout the book Álvares later wrote about his experiences, he consistently called the Ethiopian emperor Prester John, but did not comment about the legend itself in any way. The following is an excerpt regarding another Portuguese missionary, Pêro da Covilhã, an earlier Portuguese explorer who had been explicitly sent in 1487, along with his companion Afonso de Paiva, to ascertain the identity of Prester John and to seek his military assistance against the Muslim Mamluks in Egypt. Álvares met da Covilhã in Ethiopia and penned the following account.]*

*Chapter CIV How Pêro da Covilhã, a Portuguese, is in the country of the Prester, and how he came there, and why he was sent.*[8]

I have sometimes spoken of Pêro da Covilhã, a Portuguese man, who is in this country, and have quoted him, and shall go on quoting him, as he is an honourable person of merit and credit, and it is reasonable that it should be told how he came to this country, and I shall give an account of it as is fit, and of what he told me about himself. Firstly, I say that he is my spiritual son, and he told me in confession, and out of it, how 33 years had passed that he had not confessed, because he said in this country they do not keep the secret of confession, and he only went to the church and there confessed his sins to God.

Besides, he related to me the beginning of his life. First, that he was a native of the town of Covilhã in the kingdoms of Portugal, and in his youth he had gone to Castile to live with Dom Afonso, Duke of Seville, and at the beginning of the wars between Portugal and Castile he had come with João de Gusmão, brother of the said Duke, to Portugal. This Dom João had given him to Dom Afonso, the King of Portugal, as a groom of the spurs, and he soon took him as his squire, and he served with arms and horse in the said wars, and went with the King to France. When the King Dom Afonso died he stayed with the King Dom Joaã his son, whom he served as squire of the guard until the treasons,[9] when the King sent him to go about Castile, because he could speak Castilian well, in order to learn who were the gentlemen who were resorting thither. When he came from Castile, the King Dom João sent him to Barbary … When he came from Barbary this time, one Afonso de Payva, a native of the town of Castel Branco, was under orders to come to these parts, and they waited for Pêro da Covilhã so they might come together. When he arrived, the king spoke to him in great secrecy, telling him that he expected a great service of him, because he had always found him a good and faithful servant, and fortunate in his acts and services, and because he knew Arabic well; and this service was that he and another

companion, who was named Afonso de Paiva, should both go to discover and learn about the Prester John and whether he bordered on the sea, and where pepper and cinnamon are to be found, and the other spices which from these parts went to Venice through the countries of the Moors: and that already he had sent on this journey a man of the house of Monterio, and a friar named Fray Antonio, a native of Lisbon, and that they had both reached Jerusalem, and had turned back there saying that it was not possible to go to those countries without knowing Arabic, and therefore, as he knew Arabic well, he requested Pêro da Covilhã to accept this journey, to do it as a special service, promising so to reward him that he would be a great man in his kingdom and all his people should ever live in contentment, and to do this service with the said Afonso de Paiva. To this Pêro da Covilhã answered that he regretted that his capacity was not as great as his desire to serve His Highness, and that as a faithful servant he accepted the journey with alacrity. They were dispatched at Santarem [Portugal] on 7th May 1487 …

*[The pair travelled from Lisbon to Barcelona, Naples, Rhodes and then Alexandria, Cairo, Suaquem (modern Suakin in Sudan), and Aden. They then split up; de Paiva went to Ethiopia while da Covilhã went to India. When da Covilhã returned from India, he learnt of the death of his companion, and proceeded to Ethiopia, whose emperor he identified as Prester John].*

**Sebastian Münster, Cosmographia**

*Date:* 1544

*[Sebastian Münster was a German cosmographer, and his sixteenth-century* Cosmographia *is, to my knowledge, the earliest German-language cosmology. The following excerpt on Prester John, here associated with Ethiopia, is full of tales common to the Marvels of the East traditions which permeate medieval encyclopedias, maps, and geographical tracts, and many of which go back to Ancient Greek archetypes.[10] Some elements appear to be borrowed directly from the* Prester John Letter. *At the end of this excerpt, the author notes his scepticism about the marvels of Prester John's land, and blames the Jews for their invention.]*

*Of Preto Ihoans Land.*

The rule and dominion of Preto Ihoan is large and of greate compasse, this country excelleth in riches, in gold, siluer, and precious

stoones. Some saye that the Ethiopes liuing vnder Presti Ihon are verye good Christians, and that fourteene kinges do homage and obeysaunce to the Emperour Presti Ihoan, wherof some be tributary also to him. The great Almener[11] of Presti Ihoan promiseth himself to fight for the Holy land. It is written that Thomas the Apostle was buried in the kingdom of Ethiope. There be beasts also in this country that haue seuen hornes in their foreheads. There be white Camels and white Beares, and horses with two hornes. It is said also that there be byrds or fowles in this country, which with their talents [talons] and nayles, will carrye away an Dre [dray], or an horse, to feede their yonge. In some part of this countrye, it is thought that there be men with hornes, and such as haue but one eye before them and two eyes behind them, and some people that feede vppon mans fleshe and deuour their owne parents, and flea [flay] and eate those which are aged. And another kind of people that hath feete like vnto horse feete and very rounde. Their women dwell seuerally [separately] and they haue three kingdomes. The thre Queenes of Amazones set forth and make preparation to warres with 300,000 souldiers of women.

The Pigmeis in Affrica be good Christians. The king of the Pigmeis warre againste foules which destroye fruite and this people dryueth them away with theyr uoyces. It is said also that there be certaine monsters which aboue the loynes are seene fourmed like vnto men, aud [but] beneath the loynes vnto horses. The Ethiopians haue an artificious [clever] waye to take Lyons and Unicornes. There haue been seene in times past Giants of three score and ten cubites in compasse, and nowe in these dayes it is said that many great Giants be there seen of thirtie and fiue cubites in height. The birde which is called a Phenix, and liueth three hundred yeares and more, is said to be set on fire and burnt through the heate of the Sunne, and that of her ashes there springeth another yong one. There is greate stoore of Pepper gathered in the woodes, which are full of Serpentes and Scorpions. and men hauing heades like vnto dogges, are said to be very cunninge in fishinge. other people there are which haue their faces in their breastes, they be strong and swift runners, and great searchers of gold and siluer. Many other such trifles and vncredible thinges the Jewes doe fable uppon the lande of Preto Ihoan, which are so farre beyonde all credite and likelyhode of truth, that I thought it better to omit them, then to occupie the reader in idle spending the time about them.

**Leo Africanus, The History and Description of Africa**

*Date:* 1550

*[Leo Africanus was a Christian writer of North African Berber descent who lived at different times in Morocco, Spain, and Italy. In 1526, he penned the* History and Description of Africa *for which he is best known. In this work, Leo associated Prester John with Ethiopia and attempted to explain the association by presenting an Ethiopian etymology for the title Prester John.]*

The Emperour of Ethiopia is not called (as some imagine) Presbiter or priest; but Pretious [Precious] Iohn. For in the Ethiopian toung he is termed Belul Gian,[12] and in the Chaldean, Encoe Gian, both which additions signifie pretious or high; so that in a maner he commeth neer vnto the titles of our princes, who are called Illustres, Excelsi, Serenissimi, etc. to signifie that they are exalted and aduanced aboue other people. and this is a common name to all the christian kings of Ethiopia; as Pharao was to the Egyptian kings, and Augustus, to the Roman emperours. Neither is this Pretious Iohn a priest by profession, but a ciuil magistrate; nor is he armed so much with religion and lawes, as with military forces.

*[There follows a description of the origins of Ethiopian Christianity, of the journeys of Pêro da Covilhã and Francisco Álvares, for which see above (pp. 217–18) of the doctrines of the Ethiopian church and various other news of Christianity in Africa. One may also read (in vol. 1, p. 30 ff.) a lengthy description of the precise boundaries of the kingdom of Prester John, i.e. Ethiopia].*

## Antonio de Torquemada, The Garden of Curious Flowers

*Date:* 1570

*[Antonio de Torquemada was a Spanish writer of the Renaissance period. Although little-known in the twenty-first century, his works were sufficiently popular in their own time as to demand translations into French, Italian, and English. The following is extracted from one such translation. The text follows the popular Socratic dialogue form so that Torquemada can propose his view that Prester John was falsely associated with Ethiopia, and rightly an Asian monarch. This argument was based on Torquemada's reading of Marco Polo and John Mandeville. In this regard, Torquemada is an early proponent of one of the most common arguments made about Prester John in the modern era.]*

*Anthonio …*
Let vs passe into Libia & Affrica, which is the second part of the world,

where we shall finde, besides many Countries conquered by the Crowne of Portugale, and reduced to the Christian faith, that on the Coast towards the South, in the midst thereof is a Christendome, so great, large, and wide, that it is little lesse then this of our Europe, which is wholy vnder the gouernment and subiection of one King and Gouernour.

*Lvdovico*
Is not that hee whom wee call Prester Iohn[?]

*AN.*
Yes, it is he indeede which is now commonly so called, but those which gaue him this name, and nowe call him so, know not what they say, nor whether they name him right or no.

*LV.*
This cannot I vnderstand, vnlesse you declare it plainlier vnto mee: for it is contrary to the common opinion of all men.

*AN.*
I confesse it to be so, and that it is a great chaunce if you find any man affirme the contrary: but if you will heare me a little, you shal vnderstand wherein the error is; so that you your self wil confes that I haue reason in that which I will say: First therefore it were good that you did vnderstand what *Paulus Iouius* entreating of this matter affirmeth, who sayth, that this name of Prester lohn is corrupted, & that his true name is Belulgian, which was common to all the Kings of that Land: the which interpreted, signifieth a rich pearle of great & incomparable excellence:[13] But turning to our purpose, if you reade the life of St Thomas the apostle, and St Luke, in the Acts of the Apostles, you shall find that St Thomas went to preach the faith in India maior, where he died, leauing conuerted to the Christian beliefe infinite multitudes of people, who electing and choosing after his death, a priest that was called Iohn, to gouerne, instruct, & rule them, from that time forward each of their Gouernors being for the most part priests, were called Priest Iohn, bearing the name of the first elected. Of their election there is written a very strange History: that at the time of the solemnity thereof, a hand of St Thomas was brought forth, into which putting a dry withered Vine, when hee that was elected passed by: the same burgened and sprouted out Vine leaues, greene branches, and sundry clusters of ripe Grapes, out of which they pressed the wine, with which they celebrated the same day seruice. But though you beleeue not this, there is no greater danger: For they had not the body of St Thomas, neither knew they where it was; and

as we find in the Chronicles of Portugale, this holy Apostle died in a Country called *Choromandel*,[14] in the kingdom of Bishaga, & in a citty named Melia, somtimes the principal of that kingdom, but now ruinated, remaining only certaine auncient and noble buildings, by which it appeareth the Citty to haue been somtimes great & populous: amongst the which there is a church held by the enhabitants in great veneration, saying, that there lay buried the body of St Thomas, & another of a King by him conuerted to the faith of Christ. The Portugales digging in search thereof, found 3. bodies, the one of the king, another of the apostle, & a third of one of his Disciples. That of the Apostle they knew by sundry markes, chiefly in that they found lying by him in his graue a Launce, with the which, the fame went in those Countries that he was slaine, vvhich opinion whole India maintayneth: but the Church in his life recordeth the same in another sort, saying, that he was wounded to death with a knife, by the hands of an Idolatrous Priest: though herein be small difference. St Isidore [of Seville] speaking of him, saith, that he died with the stroke of a Launce, & his body, as it is written in his life, was transported into the Country of Syria, into the Citty of aedisa [Edessa]: and this is that which we chiefly ought to beleeue. But how so euer it be, S[aint] Mathew was he who preached in aethipia, and St Thomas in India, after whom succeeded Prester Iohn, whose beginning of rule was great & mighty, which authority in space of time they came to loose, and to be yoked vnder the subiection of the great Cham. The manner of this, being so far off, hath not beene well vnderstooode, though some haue endeuoured to write and giue notice thereof, principally, though passing obscurely a certayne armenian: but certayne it is, that there are as yet sundry tokens of this Christianity. Iohn Mandeuile vvryteth in the description of a iourney, vvhich he made, that there are many of these Christian Prouinces vnder the dominion & Empire of great Cham, whom at his entry into their Townes, they encounter with their Cleargy in Procession, & the holy Crosse before them, to which hee boweth & maketh low reuerence: and that they blesse fiue Apples, presenting them vnto him in a dish, of which hee taketh and eateth of the one: If he refuse so to doe, they take it for a great disfauour. Lodouicus Patritius Romanus,[15] writeth, that being in Taprobana,[16] he found there sundry Merchants of the fore-said Prouinces, who professed the faith of Christ, making him great and large offers, if hee would accompany them home into their Country, & instruct them more amply & throughly in the faith, according to the vse of the Romain Church: which request of theirs he would willingly haue accomplished, but that he dared not vndertake so far a voyage: so that heereby wee may gather, that Prester Iohn is not hee which is in Aethiopia but he who was in the Oriental Indies, and that he name

giuen vnto him of Aethiopia, was but through error, & because the people would haue it to be so. Iohannes Teuronicus, in his book of the rites & customes of Nations, is as well deceaued also in this matter as the rest, following the common opinion, that he of Aethiopia in Afrique should be Prester Iohn[17]: the other hauing raigned & beene subdued in the end of Asia, where, as I said, the great Cham or Tartare holdeth his Empire & signeury, who as it is thought, is one of the puissantest [most powerful] & mightiest monarches of the world, & so he entituleth himselfe King of Kings, & Lord of Lords. This matter, though otherwise well knowne and verified, is also confirmed by *Marcus Paulus Venetus* [i.e. Marco Polo], who was along time resident in Townes & Citties of his Empire, and by an English Knight, likewise called Iohn Mandeuile, who seruing him in his warrs, receaued his wages & pention.

## Joseph Scaliger, On the Correction of Times[18]

*Date:* 1583

*[This text affords one of the most interesting attempts to rationally deduce the translocation of Prester John from Asia to Africa. Joseph Scaliger was a well-educated aristocratic Dutch religious leader. Scaliger realised that Prester John was in his time associated with Ethiopia, but was previously associated with Asia. Instead of arguing that one or the other was true, Scaliger proposed that the Ethiopians had previously lived in Asia in suzerainty to the Mongols, and that Chingis Khan attacked and expelled them, whereupon they fled eventually to settle in Africa. Peter Heylyn (printed below on pp. 239–40), penned a scathing refutation of Scaliger's hypothesis, describing it as 'a monstrous and undefensible fancy … found in no record but in Scaliger's head'. Others, like Samuel Purchas (below on pp. 236–8), supported Scaliger's views.]*

*On the Ethiopian Computation*

In our recollection, there were in Italy certain churches of the Christian Ethiopians, who they call Abassins or Abissins. There were also [churches of people from] Jerusalem, Alexandria, and Cairo: so they cannot be unknown to us. Indeed, by the navigations of the Portuguese, and by the splendid book of the journey of the Portuguese priest Francisco Alvarez, who penetrated into the inmost Ethiopia, one may learn many things about those men and their rites.[19] Once, all Africa from the Nile's final mouth, to the Gaditan straits [i.e. the Straits of Gibraltar], and likewise from the Tyrrhenian Sea to beyond

the Equinox towards the south, was full of Christian churches and cities, and this great tract of lands was obedient to the one Bishop of Alexandria. But if there are any churches remaining today in those parts, they recognise that patriarch alone, like these Ethiopians, being discussed now, and whom the lonely deserts and difficult routes defend from the general wasteland of Africa. For without the existence [of the Ethiopian church], either there would be no Christianity in those regions, or but little, and under the tyranny of Muhammadanism. Before the arrival of the Portuguese in Ethiopia, the name of the Ethiopian Christians alone was scarcely known to us, and their falsely named emperor Prestegiani; since that name does not belong to he who reigned in Ethiopia, but he who reigned in Asia three hundred years previously, a long way distant. That [name] is in the Persian language αποστολικός [apostolikos], but in that language فرستّحان [Fristihān] פְּרֶסְתֲנָאן pərāsətənán] are απόστολοι are [apostoloi] فرستّحاني [Fristihānī] פְּרֶסְתֲנָאנִי [pərāsəṯənánī] αποστολικός [apostolikos]: which name properly belongs to the highest priest, or rather, ἀρχιερεῖ[arkhierei, 'high priest'], which is likewise [applied] to the king [Fadesha Fristijānī] *Padescha Prestigiani,* apostolic King, which in Ethiopie is ፋጣሽ ሐዋርያዊ ቄ። [negus hawariyawi, 'apostolic emperor'] חַוַרְיָוִי נְגוּשׁ [nagus hawaryāwī], but in Arabic : الملك رسولي [al-mālik rasūlī, meaning 'owner of the apostolic']. Therefore, they falsely call him Prestegiani, and [to say] that this Ethiopian is the same as that asian man out of the itinerary of Paul the Venetian [i.e. Marco Polo] because they are both Christian is utter nonsense. It is indeed correct that three hundred years previously, certain Ethiopian kings ruled far and wide in asia, especially in Drangiana, at the ends of Susa,[20] and in India, until the emperors of the Tartars expelled them from all of asia, and they were the first ones defeated, so they say, by Chingis, King of the Tartars, having killed their emperor Uncam.[21] Then they added to Cincanus the son of Chingis [?], and his son Bathinus Cam [Batu Khan?], all those Ethiopians who had been thrown out of the kingdom of the Mongols and Chinese and were driven all the way to furthest Mrica. Truly, it seems very wonderful to us that a people today thoroughly ignorant of the business of seafaring used to be very powerful on land and sea, so that the borders of their empire extended from Ethiopia to China. He who has had experience with the life and customs of the abassines will never believe this, but they would urge us to [provide] facts. Indeed, they say that there are many Ethiopian crosses remaining today in Japan, China, and other places, witnesses to the empire of the Ethiopians. Besides, the temple of Thomas the apostle, situated in the region of Malabar, in its structure, crosses, and other monuments is nothing but Ethiopian. They add that the name Havariia is neither Persian, nor Indian. This

plainly signifies ‘apostle’ in Ethiopie: ሐዋርያ: [hawariya, ‘apostle’] חַוַרְיָ [hawaryi], which is pronounced the same by them and the Arabs. For also, in Arabic حولرية [hūlriya] are ‘apostles’. Paul the Venetian [i.e. Marco Polo] incorrectly interprets this as ‘holy man’. Also, andreas Corsalis[22] writes that there are two sepulchres in the region of India, which he names Colan [?] – one that of Thomas the apostle, the other of a certain Ethiopian from the region of Prester John, who accompanied that apostle. In fact, these Ethiopians that have been discussed are called الحبش [al-Habash] Elhabaschi, and they are called abassi and abasseni by the common people. It is proven that they are not Αιθιοπας αυτόχθοιας [‘aithiopas autokthoias’; i.e. native Ethiopians], but that they were brought there from Arabia …

**Ralph Standish and Ralph Croft, Journal**

*Date:* June, 1612

*[Ralph Standish and Ralph Croft were two sailors on a ship called the Hosiander who took part in the voyage of Thomas Best from England to India in the early seventeenth century, in the early years of the British East India Company. Their route took them southwards along the west coast of Africa, around the Cape of Good Hope, up part of the east coast of Africa and then across the Arabian Sea to India. While offshore at Mozambique, Standish and Croft believed they had passed the country of Prester John, but instead of a rich and famous king, they were presented with, in their eyes, only uncultured, lawless savages.]*

*6 and 7th of this instantt [June, 1612].*

The *Sallomons* company and we had bene ashoare, butt could nott trad with the salvashes, for that they would nott sell ther sheepp and oxen for iron, butt for brasse. So they gave us eyther shipp a lamme for a presentt. And thus we contented ourselves to taike the pleassure of the shoare; where we had exccellentt good watter and many good and sweett herbbes, wheerof we maid salletts. Heere was grasse aboundannce, and heerbes which gave unto us many sweett and pleasant smells. This land of Cape de Bona Essperannca[23] is within the region and government of Prester John; the connttrey being firttille ground and pleasantt, and a connttrey verie temperatt; butt the people bruitt and savadg, withoutt religion, without languag, without lawes or government, without manners or humanittie, and last of all withoutt apparell, for they go naked, save onelie a peec of a sheepes skyn to cover ther members, that my opinion yt is greatt pittie that

such creattures as they bee should enjoy so sweett a connttrey. Ther persons are preporcionable; butt ther faces like an appe or babownne, with flatt nosses; and ther heads and faces both beastlie and fillthye to behould, for want of cleanlienesse. They were [wear] aboutt ther neeccks the intralls of sheepp, and doth eatte the pudinges skines with raw sewett [fat] and rawe blod; and divers other thinges they eatt, which is most beastlie to behold .

*23 June [1612].*

In this land of Prester John ther was seene by our men lyons and monkeyes, babownns a multi[tu]d, with divers other strange beastes, as antilops, and many other deformed creattures, verie strange to be sene.

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1 For which, see below on pp. 284–6.

2 See Appendix 3, on p. 321.

3 Both Jordanus of Severac's *Mirabilia* and Jacob of Verona's *Liber Peregrinationis* place Prester John in Ethiopia without explanation. Both are roughly contemporary. See below on p. 282 for details. For Jacques de Vitry, see his *Letter 2* above on pp. 99-100.

4 Charles Beckingham, 'An Ethiopian Embassy to Europe, c.1310', *Journal of Semitic Studies,* vol. 14 (1989), pp. 337–46; reprinted in *PJMTLT,* pp. 197–206, here p. 339 (original pagination)

5 Modern Beyoğlu, a district of Istanbul.

6 The Gihon, one of the four rivers of paradise, is a common feature of the Prester John legend. See the *Relatio de Davide* above on p.108.

7 See the *Prester John Letter,* above p. 78.

8 On Pêro da Covilhã, see also pp. 305–10 (original pagination) of Charles Beckingham, 'The Quest for Prester John' *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library,* vol. 62 (1980), pp. 291–310; also reprinted in *PJMTLT,* pp. 271–90 and in Beckingham, *Between Islam and Christendom* (London, 1983)

9 Referring to the events connected with the trial and execution of the Duke of Bragança for treason in 1484.

10 For these traditions, see Rudolf Wittkower, 'Marvels of the East', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtuald Institutes,* vol. 5 (1942), pp. 159–97

11 i.e. almoner: a chaplain responsible for distributing alms

12 The 'Belul Gian' argument was first made by Saga Za Ab, for whom see below on p. 236, n.2.

13 i.e. Paolo Giovio. This is the argument made common by Saga Za ab's embassy to Europe in 1527–33. See below, p. 236, n.2. See also Edward aston in appendix 1 at p. 291.

14 Coromandel refers to the south-western coast of the Indian peninsula, with which St Thomas is often associated.

15 Italian explorer Ludovico di Varthema, who in 1502-7 travelled through the Near East, India, and South-East Asia.

16 Taprobane is an island mentioned initially by Ptolemy, and later identified as various actual islands. It most likely refers in this instance to Sri Lanka.

17 I have been unable to trace this reference.

[18] Special thanks to Marcus Harvey, Joel Nothman and Assefa Bekele for their help with the oriental languages in this text.

[19] For Alvares, see above, pp. 217–18.

[20] Drangiana is an ancient name for the area around Lake Hāmūn in the modern Persian province of Sīstān, on the country's far eastern border with Afghanistan. Sūsa is in western Iran.

[21] This is the familiar Ong Khan (i.e. Toghrul) of the medieval texts, for see p. 157, n.11.

[22] andreas Corsali was an early sixteenth-century Italian explorer of India and Southeast asia. Some of his letters were published by the famous Italian publisher Ramusio in 1550.

[23] i.e. the Cape of Good Hope, near the southern tip of Africa

# Section 5 – Legends and Lies (Late Sixteenth and Early Seventeenth Centuries)

*The following three texts make up the shortest and most disconnected section of this book. They are examples of ways in which Prester John was used in fictional texts like that of Richard Johnson, and in propagandistic texts like that of Suffridus Petrus. The Suffridus Petrus text is valuable for its uniqueness; Petrus, as part of his larger programme to create a Frisian national identity, attempted to claim Prester John was a Frisian who had journeyed to the Holy Land with Charlemagne in the eighth century, and continued onwards to settle in India as the famous Prester John. This was all, of course, deliberate invention with a clear propagandistic cause of promoting the Frisian national interest.*

**Edward Webbe, Travels**

*Date:* 1590

*[Edward Webbe was Chief Master Gunner of England, and during the latter half of the sixteenth century, he and his army embarked upon a journey throughout the Holy Land, Egypt, Greece, Russia and 'the land of Prester John'. Like Mandeville and other travel writers before him, Webbe extended his own travels with embellishment.]*

Thus being chiefe maister Gunner in these Turkish warres, I was sent for againe by commandement of ye Turk to Dasmasco, where I staied all that winter with xx thousand men. And from thence made prouision to make wars against the land of Prester Iohn, who is by profession a Christian. In this land of Prester Iohn, when it doth raine, it continueth at the least one whole moneth.
[…]

From Damasco we went into the land of prester Iohn who is a Christian, and is called *Christien de Sentour*: that is, the Christian of the

Gerdell:[1] against this prester Iohn, I went with the Turks power, and was then their maister Gunner in the field, ye number of Turkish Souldiers sent thither, was fiue hundred thousand men who went thither by land, and pitched themselues in battaile ray [array] at Saran [?], neere to the place wher the son of prester Iohn keepeth his Court. There Prester Iohn with his power, flew of ye Turks the number of 60. thousand. onely by policie of drawe Bridges to let foorth water, made as secrete slewses for that purpose, in which water so many Turks perished. The next day following, the Turkes power did incompasse Prester Iohns sonne and tooke him prisoner, and sent him for a present to ye great Turks Court then being at Constantinople, but soone after, prester Iohn himselfe made an agreement betweene the greate Turke and his sonne, that the one shoulde not demaund tribute of the other, and so his sonne was released and sent home againe.

This Prester Iohn of whom I spake before, is a King of great power, and keepeth a very bountifull Court, after the manner of that Cuntrey, and hath euery day to serue him at his Table sixty kinges, wearing leaden Crownes on their heads, and those serue in the meat vnto Prester Iohns Table: and continually the first dish of meat set vppon his Table, is a dead mans scull cleane picked and laide in black Earth: putting him in minde that he is but Earth, and that he must die, and shal become Earth againe.[2]

These 60 Kings are all his Wize Royes [viceroys] in seuerall places, and they haue their Deputies to svpply their Roomes, and those kings liue continually in Prester Iohns Courte, and go no furder then they may be still attendant vppon him, without leaue of their Emperour Prester Iohn.

In the Court of Prester Iohn, there is a wilde man, and an other in the high street at Constantinople, whose allowance is euery day a quarter of Raw Mutton: and when any man dyeth for some notorious offence, then are they allowed euery day a quarter of mans flesh.

These wilde men are chained fast to a post euery day, the one in Prester Iohns Court, and the other in the high street of Constantinople, each of them hauing a Mantel cast about their shoulders, and all oier their bodies they haue wonderfull long haire, they are Chained fast by the neck, and will speedily deuoure any man that commeth in their reach.

There is also a Beast in the Court of Prester John, called Arians, hauing 4 heades, they are in shape like a wilde Cat, and are of the height of a great mastie [mastiff] Dog.

In this Court likewise, there is Fowles caled Pharses foules whose feathers are very beautifull to be worne, these fowles are as big as a Turkie, their flesh is very sweet, and their feathers of all manners of Collours.

There is swannes in that place, which are as lardge againe as the swannes of Englande are, and their Feathers are as blew as any blew cloath.

I haue seen in a place like a Park adioyning vnto prester Iohns Court, three score and seuen-teene, Vnicornes and Eliphants all aliue at one time, and they were so tame that I haue played with them as one would play with young Lambes.

When Prester Iohn is serued at his table, there is no salt at all set one in any salt sellar as in other places, but a loafe of Bread is cut crosse, and then two kniues are layde a crosse vpon the loafe, and some salt put vpon the blades of the kniues and no more.

Being thus in the land of prester Iohn, I trauelled within Eighteene degrees of ye sun, euery degree being in distance three score miles.

## Suffridus Petrus, On Frisian Writers

*Date:* Before 1597

*[Suffridus Petrus, a Frisian writer, here attempted to appropriate Prester John as a Frisian national, in association with a contemporary burgeoning of Frisian nationalism. Petrus describes a certain John Adgill, who allegedly accompanied Charlemagne on his legendary journey to the Holy Land in the eighth century, with Charlemagne's journey to the east being a common and widely believed story throughout the Middle Ages. But Petrus uniquely describes this Adgill, who continued beyond the Holy Land to conquer India, whereupon his name John became the title for subsequent kings of India: Prester John. It seems, however, that later readers did not take Petrus' ideas on board.[3]]*

*John, surnamed Prester*

John Adgill, the second of his name, son of the King of the Frisians, born in between the brothers Gundobald and Radbod, called Prester by the common people on account of contempt for his ancestral kingdom, a singular zeal for the propagation of the Christian Religion, and an incomparably virtuous life. He made an expedition together with Otger, King of the Danes, under Charles the Great [i.e. Charlemagne] into the Holy Land. And when Jerusalem had been captured, when Charles turned back, aiming for Germany, he [Adgill], together with Otger, proceeded into India, where, after he had occupied a tremendous area of land, set up a Kingdom, which is named after him the Kingdom of Prester John. His successors, most powerful kings, have thereafter been called Prester John. indeed

afterwards, it was called the Kingdom of the Abyssinians, about which we will discuss fully in our work *On the Colonies of the Frisians*, and in the book of our fourteen annals.[4] This John wrote to his nephew Gundobald, the son of Radbod, about the expedition of Charles, the King of the Franks, to the Holy Land, as Cappidus bears witness, who was very close to him at times:

*On his expedition into India. On the nature of the Indian Land. On the variety of peoples there.*

He flourished under Charles the Great, around the year of Christ 790.

## Richard Johnson, The most pleasant history of Tom a Lincolne

*Date:* 1607

*[The present excerpt derives from an early seventeenth-century English prose Arthurian romance. Its author, Richard Johnson, although little known in the twenty-first century, was a contemporary of Shakespeare who was extremely popular in his own day. Although the present book has not focussed on fictional texts, the inclusion of one example is useful to demonstrate Prester John's role therein.]*

*CHAP. VI. What happened to the Red-Rose Knight, and his company in the Court of Prester Iohn, and how the Red-Rose Knight slew a Dragon with three tongues, that kept a golden Tree in the same Country: with other attempts that happned.*

The next Morning by the breake of day, the *Red-rose Knight* rose from his Cabbin, and went vpon the Hatches of the Shippe, casting his eyes round about, to see if hee could espie some Towne or Cittie where they might take harbour: and in looking about hee espied a great spacious Cittie, in the middle whereof stood a most sumptuous Pallace, hauing many high Towers standing in the ayre like the Grecian *Piramides,* the which he supposed to be the Pallace of some great Potentate: therefore calling sir *Lancelot* (with two other Knights) vnto him, hee requested them to goe vp into the Citie, and to enquire of the Countrey, and who was the Gouernour thereof; the which thing they promised to doe: so arming themselues, (as it was conuenient, being strangers in that Country) they went vp into the Citie; where they were presently presented vnto *Prester Iohn,* who (being alwayes liberall and courteous vnto strangers) gaue them a royall intertainment, leading them vp into his Pallace: and hauing intelligence that they were Englishmen, and aduenturous trauaileurs,

he sent foure of his Knights for the rest of their company, desiring them in the Knights behalfe, to returne to the Court, where they should haue a friendly welcome, and a Knightly entertainment.

Thus when the *Red-rose Knight* had vnderstoode the will of *Prester Iohn,* by his foure Knights, the next euening with his whole company hee repaired to the Cittie, which was right Noble and fayre, and although it was night, yet were the stréetes as light as though it had béene mid-day, by the cleare resplendant brightnesse of Torches, Cressetts, and other Lights which the Citizens ordained to the intertaining of the *English Knights.* The stréets through which they passed to goe to the Kings Pallace, were filled with people, as Burgomasters [Mayors], Knights, and Gentlemen, with Ladies & beautifull Damosels, which in comely order stood beholding their comming. But when the *Red-rose Knight* was entred the Pallace: hée found the renowned *Prester Iohn* sitting vpon his Princely Throne, vnder propt with pillers of Iasper stone: who after he had giuen them an honorable welcome, he took the *Red-rose Knight* by the hand, and led him vp into a large and sumptious Hall, the richest that euer he had séene in all his life: But in going vp certaine stayres hée looked in at a window, and espied fayre *Anglitora* the Kings daughter, sporting amongst other Ladyes; which was the fayrest mayde that euer mortall eye behelde, and I thinke that Nature her selfe could not frame her like: but being entred the Hall, they found the Tables couered with costly fare ready for supper: when as the *English Knights* were set at the Kings Table in company of *Prester Iohn* and *Anglitora,* with other Ladyes attending (hauing good stomaches) they fedd lustily; but *Anglitora* which was placed right ouer against the *Red-rose Knight,* fedde only vpon his beauty and princely behauiour, not being able to withdraw her eyes from his diuine excellencie: but the renowned *Prester Iohn* for his part, spent away the supper time, with many pleasant conferences touching the countrey of *England* and King *Arthurs* princely Court: the report of which fame, had so often sounded in his eares. But amongst all other deuises, he told the *English Knights* of a Trée of gold, which now grew in his Realme, and yéerely brought foorth golden fruit, but he could not enioy the benefit thereof, by reason of a cruell Dragon that continually kept it: for the conquest of which golden tree, hée had many times solemnly proclaimed through that part of the World, that if any Knight durst attempt to conquer it, and by good fortune bring the aduenture to an end, he should haue in reward thereof his Daughter the faire *Anglitora* in marriage: to which many Knights reserted as well of fortaine Countreys, as his owne Nation; but none proued so fortunate to accomplish the wished conquest, but lost their liues in the same aduenture: therefore i fully beléeue, if all the Knights in the world were assembled together, yet

were they all vnsufficient to ouercome that terrible Dragon.

With that the *Red-rose Knight* with a bold courage stood vp, and protested by the loue he bore vnto his countryes King, he would performe the enterprise, or lose his life in the attempt.

*[The Red-Rose knight then proceeds upon his endeavour to kill the dragon, is successful, and wins his prize, Anglitora, daughter of Prester John].*

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1 Based on a Christian relic ('the girdle') associated with St Thomas, the term 'Christians of the Girdle' came to be equivalent with the term 'St Thomas Christians', who were variously identified throughout the later Middle Ages and Early Modern period. See Francis Rogers, *The Quest for Eastern Christians: Travels and Rumor in the Age of Discovery* (Minneapolis, 1962), p. 25

2 See the *Prester John Letter*, above at p. 78.

3 See Suffridus Petrus entry in Appendix 1, below on p. 290.

4 I have been unable to trace these works, if they exist at all.

# Section 6 – Unravelling Prester John (Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries)

*From the seventeenth century onwards, scholars and orientalists began to put forward their explanations for the phenomenon of Prester John. Although firmly associated with Ethiopia in common parlance, many of these writers posited from having read Marco Polo's* Travels *and other texts that he was a monarch who had once existed in Asia. This was an exceedingly common point of view. A great many therefore attempted to refute the association between Prester John and Ethiopia and explain, using Ethiopian linguistics, how it had come about. Portuguese missionaries were becoming increasingly familiar with the customs and languages of Ethiopia, and this allowed such linguistic investigations to take place.*

*At the same time, Europeans were becoming increasingly familiar with Asia's diverse cultures. For this reason, while some examined the connection between Prester John and Ethiopia, others claimed that Prester John was to be located in China or Tibet, with Philippe Avril and others even claiming that Prester John was the same as the Dalai Lama, a figure who had only come to the attention of Europeans in the seventeenth century. During this time some declared agreement, and others disagreement, with the hypothesis put forward by Scaliger that the Ethiopians were initially Mongol subjects resident in Asia, who had fled the advances of Chingis Khan. The present work concludes with the earliest source to declare that Prester John did not exist and had never existed.*

**Samuel Purchas, Pilgrimage**

*Date:* 1613

*[Samuel Purchas was an early seventeenth-century English cleric with a keen interest in travel narratives about Asia. He continued work on Richard Hakluyt's huge collection of itineraries after Hakluyt had passed away. Purchas, with scholarly acuity, here reviews the various hypotheses as to the location of Prester John and the origin of his name, eventually*

*concluding that he was once an Asian monarch whose name was mistakenly applied to the emperors of Ethiopia.]*

Now if any wonder at such an extrauagant discourse of India here, let him know that in our search for *Presbyter Iohn,* which then was knowne to withstand the Tartarts [sic] in Asia, I cannot see how he can be the Abissine or Ethiopian: but rather thinke that when a mighty Christian Prince was found in Ethiopia, they did imagine him to be that *Presbyter Iohn,* of which they had heard in Asia; being furthered in this errour by the name, India, which, as is said, did generally comprehend both the true India, & this, more truly called Ethiopia. Now for that *Presbyter Iohn* in India, i take him for some Christian King: for at that time there were many Christians, as appeareth by *Venetes* [i.e. Marco Polo], in manner dispersed throughout Asia: and some, called St *Thomas* Christians, remaine in India to this day. why I thinke it not to agree to the Abissine, my reasons besides the former are, the distance of place: all that huge tract of Arabia, with the wide seas on each side, separating India from Ethiopia: the vnpassable Deserts by land: No mention in history who should dispossesse them of that India *Maior,* where the Tartar had neuer any great power: the Histories which wee haue of those Indian Princes, the Kings of Malabar, of Decamo, the samorin, &c.[1] are against it: the difference of Religion; for those Indian Christians of St *Thomas* are not branded with hote irons, nor circumcised, not agree in other rites with the Ethiopian: the Ethiopian History challengeth no such large extents to their empire, except in Africa, where they seate them in a continuall descent, from the time of *Salomon,* till now, whereas those *Presbyter-Iohns* had their dwelling and abode in Asia, as their stories *signifie*. And further, the name Priest-*Iohn* is a name vnknowne in Ethiopia, and by ignorant mistaking of the Europaeans, applied to that Ethiopian Emperour when first they heard of him, as saith *Zaga Zabo* his Embassadour to the King of Portugall,[2] who reproueth the men of these parts saying that he is named of them *Belul,* which signifieth Excelcellent, or precious, and in the Chaldaean tongue, *Ioannes Encoe;* which signifieth the same. *Sabellieus* saith, the Ethiopians called him *Gyan;*[3] *Linschoten* affirmeth,[4] *Bel Gyan:* (*Bel* signifieth the highest, and *Gyan,* Lord. But Frier *Luys* out of *Baltasar* the Ethiopian,[5] sheweth that in the hill Amara [in Ethiopia] are ancient records, which testifie that from the time of that Queene that came to *Salomon,* the Emperours haue been called *Beldigian,* the signification whereof is, a precious stone, or a thing of great value: which Title hath continued to those Emperours, as *Pharao* to the Egyptians, and *Caesar* to the Romans. Some also of the Royall bloud (which are vsually kept, as after shall appeare, in the hill Amara)

when they are elected to the Empire, if there bee many of that Imperiall issue; take orders & become Priests, not procreating any Children. Such saith he in our times haue beene *Daniel* the second, *Paphnutius,* that succeeded to *Naum,* and *Alexander* the third his successour, all which were both Priestes and Kings; and therefore by the Aethiopians which resort to the Holy Sepulcher at Ierusalem, & vsed to speake Greek, were called Priest *Beldigian.* This by corruption of the name by Merchants, and such as knew not the signification, and also for breuities sake, was pronounced Priest *Gian* or *Iohn.* Now for the Priest *Iohn* in Asia, he tels that when St *Thomas* was martyred in India, the three *Magi,* who had visited Christ by the leading of a *Starre* in his Infancie, and had after beene consecrated Bishops ouer their seuerall Kingdomes (you must not deny their royalty) by the Apostle; chose one amongst themselues to be Priest & King, who was called Priest *Iohn.* If you beleeue not *Peter de Natalibus*,[6] out of whom the Frier cites this, I should be too much troubled in perswading you. Hee telleth also out of *Otho Frisingensis,* that about the yeare 1145. one *Iohn* a Christian, both King and Priest.[7] reigning in the furthest parts of the East, warred vpon, and ouercame the Medes, Assyrians. & Persians, and had intended to free Ierusalem out of Saracenicall seruitude, but not finding passage ouer Tigris, was forced to returne. This is like to hee that *Presbyter Iohn*, whose posterity vsed that stratageme before mentioned against the Tartars. And to him I thinke might fitly agree that Title of *Prestegian* (easily deflected and altered to *Priest. Iohn*) whereof you haue heard out of *Ioseph Scaliger*.[8] I haue seene a Manuscript in old French, pretended to be a Letter from *Prester Iohn,* to the emperor *Frederike,* wherin is discoursed of the site, greatnes, puissance, wealth, and other rarities of his estate: but finding so many monsters, and vncouth relations therin, i could not be so prodigall of faith or penurious of iudgement, as to value his authoritie at any high rate:[9] wherin sir *Iohn Mandeuill* seemes to haue been a lender or borrower, so iustly doe they agree, in disagreeing from both probabilitie and possibilitie of truth:[10] yet both in the one and the other, we may obserue the like situation of *Prester Iohns* dwelling in these parts of Asia, neere Persia: and that such a multitude of Fables could not but haue some truth for their ground. My conclusion is, that for that name of *Prestegian,* i like vvell *Scaligers* interpretation, and thinke that it may agree either to this, or some other Christian Prince at those times in India, which is far neerer to Persia, and from whence the Indians borrowed their Royal titles, both in those times & since.

**Peter Heylyn, Cosmographie**

*Date:* 1652

*[Peter Heylyn was an English ecclesiastic of the seventeenth century with an active interest in history, politics, and geography. The following excerpt begins with a firm refutation of Scaliger's hypothesis that the Ethiopians were originally an Asian people (for which, see above on pp. 225–6). Following this, Heylyn sets up his own account of the origin of the title Prester John, concluding he was originally an Asian monarch, and using linguistic examples to argue that a simple misunderstanding could have led the Portuguese to believe that the Ethiopian leader was Prester John.]*

Those of most note in *Tenduc*[11] It self, 1. *Coras* [Khwarezm?], the ordinary sepulture of the Kings of *Tenduc,* before it was subdued by the *Tartars,* and since that also. 2. *Ca[r]acoras,* [Karakorum] where *Cingis* was first honoured with the Title of King. The Kings hereof bearing the port of Kings, and the office of Priests, were antiently called by the name of *Presbyter Johannes,* or *Prester John:* a title now erroniously conferred by some on the Emperour of the *Abassines* or *Aethiopians* in *Africk*. Concerning which it is a wonder, that *Joseph Scaliger,* a man of such infinite reading, should be so deceived: and by the authority of his judgement deceive so many.[12] For finding that there was a *Presbyter Johannes* in the North of *Asia,* and hearing vulgarly that title given unto him in *Africk;* he fell upon a fancie that this *Abassine* Emperour was formerly of so great power, as to extend his empire over *India,* and the *North* of *Asia;* and in this last, for the assurance of his conquests, to hold his residence. A monstrous, and undefensible fancy. For besides that all histories, even those of the *Abassines* themselves, are silent in it: how improbable is it, that a King reigning in the heart of *A[fric]k,* should subdue the most remote parts of *Asia;* and there keep his Court: so many great States and most puissant Nations, being interposed? or that so memorable an exploit should be buried in silence, and found in no record but in *Scaligers* head? Besides it is well known, and generally granted, that the *Presbyter John* of *Asia,* was by Sect a *Nestorim;* but he that is so called in *Africk,* of the Sect of the *Jacobites:* and further, that the Christians of *Aethiop* are circumcised, which never was reported of those of *Asia.*

Letting this pass therefore as an unwarrantable and ill-grounded fancy, we are to know that formerly this Province of *Tenduc*, was under the old Kings of *Cathay,* till the time of *Cin-Cham* [Cinghis Khan], the King thereof. After whose death a certain *Nestorin* shepheard (that is to say, the master of great flocks of sheep) being Governour of the *Yaymans* [Naimans], a People of *Tenduc,* took to himself the title of king of *Tenduc*, whom they called by the name of *Pr[…]st John,* or Prince *John* (the same word in their language, as in

the *Hebr[ew]*, signifieth both *Priest* and *Prince.*) Dying he bequeathed his estate and flocks to his brother *Unt-[c]ham,* (commonly called in one word *Uncham*)[13] a greater sheep-master than he, whose flocks ranged over all the pastures of the *Moles,* or *Monguls* and *Tartars,* though dwelling fourteen daies journey off, whom he had in subjection: the title of *Priest John,* or *Presbyter Johannes,* going along with the dignity and Royall estate. And though afterwards this *Uncham* was subdued by the *Tartars,* yet his posterity for long time were suffered to enjoy the title of Kings and Presbyters; (but Vassals, and *Homagers,* to the Great *Cham*): the *Great Chams,* in regard of their nobility, and royall parentage, bestowing their daughters on them in marriage; as is said by *William de Rubraquis* [William of Rubruck], who travelled in these Countries, Anno 1253. the King hereof being then named *George* (the fourth from *Uncham*) but commonly called *Presbyter Johannes,* as his Fathers were.[14]

[…]

And this so commonly received, that he [the Ethiopian emperor] is vulgarly called by the name of *Prester John,* and his estate the Empire of *Prester John;* with no truth at all. Others more probably conceive, that this vulgar name of *Prester-John,* is but a corruption or mistake for *Praetegian* or *Precious John;* and that the word *Prete* (by which his subjects call him) importeth no less. and yet I more incline to those, who finding that the word *Prestegan* signifieth an *Apostle,* in the *Persian* tongue, and *Prestigani,* an *Apostlical* man: do thereupon infer that the title of *Padescha Prestigiani,* an *Apostolick King,* was given unto him for the *Orthodoxie* of his belief, which not being understood by some, instead of *Preste-gian,* they have made *Priest John,* in *Latine Presbyter Johannes*; as by a like mistake, one *Pregent* (or *Pragian* as the *French* pronounce it) commander of some Gallies under *Lewis* the 12. [i.e. Louis XII, King of France] was by the *English* of those times called *Prior John.*[15] *Prestegian then,* not *Priest-John,* is his proper adjunct; contractedly, but commonly called the *Prete* by the Modern *French* who usually leave out s before a *consonant.*

**Balthazar Téllez, The Travels of the Jesuits in Ethiopia**

*Date:* 1660

*[Balthazar Téllez was a Portuguese writer who compiled his history of the Jesuits in Ethiopia from various sources, chiefly the writings of Manuel de Almeida who spent some time in Ethiopia in the 1620s. Of the many*

*writers who put forward the hypothesis that Prester John was falsely associated with Ethiopia because he was an Asian monarch, Téllez does so elegantly, and his writings went on to influence others. Téllez, following his sources, blamed Pêro da Covilhã for the false Ethiopian attribution, though in reality the association between Prester John and Ethiopia predates da Covilhã by more than a century and a half.*[16]*]*

*Of the Name of Prester John, vulgarly given to the Emperor of Ethiopia; the occasion of that Mistake, and the proper Name of this Empire.*

The Portuguese Nation having extended their Discoveries and Conquests along the Coasts of Africk, and proceeded thence to the, before unknown, remotest Eastern Shores; Europe was not only enrich'd with the precious Spices and other valuable Commodities of those Parts; but improv'd with the Knowledge of new Monarchies and Empires, Spacious Provinces, Wealthy and Large Islands, Warlike Nations, and variety of Countries, to which the ablest Cosmographers were before utter Strangers; so that we may say, the World is beholding to the Portugueses for this increase of Wealth, and addition of Extent.

Among the other Regions we came acquainted with, by means of this wonderful discovery of India, one was the Upper Ethiopia, which lies next to Egypt, vulgarly call'd Prester John's Country, of which tho' many Authors have writ much, yet was it so variously, and with such unintelligible Confusion, that some discours'd, and others deliver'd Fables of it, that he would do no small Service to the Publick, who should untye or cun asunder these Gordian Knots, and lead the way out of this dark and intricate Labyrinth. At this Time we have such true and certain Information of the Affairs of that Empire, by such means as are mention'd in the Preface, and will appear to those who read these Travels, that I could not but think I should much oblige all curious Persons, and perform a work most acceptable to Men of Erudition, in giving a full Account, in this Volume, of all we now know concerning those Parts of Ethiopia, not only as to Temporals, but also in Relation to Religion, the whole Truth, as to both Points being now certainly found out; so that I may be bold to say, I can offer this as a History altogether new, notwithstanding some may think it very old and much handled by others; because Truth it self, which always prevails, will afford it such a Grace, as is an Ornament to all Novelty.

I concluded this work would be the more acceptable, in regard I am fully satisfy'd that the Accounts of those Parts are either corrupted by the Fictions of fabulous Authors, or else very imperfect, for want of sufficient and credible information, which has given occasion to forge

the most Chimerical and useless stories of it in the World, and even more pernicious than the fam'd Romances, which being full of Witty inventions, and deliver'd in a lofty stile, serve to divert the Readers, as Learned and ingenious Fables; whereas these other Writers, have endeavour'd to impose upon the unwary, by representing their vile Forgeries for valuable Truths.

To come to the point, before we launch out into the Affairs of this Upper Ethiopia, it will be convenient to show its proper Name, for as much as Historians have spoken very variously of it, and having err'd in the very Beginning, no wonder they should afterwards utter so much impertinence, like those of whom the Prophet says, *They are estrang'd from the Womb, they go astray as soon as they be born, speaking lies,* Psal. 58.3. The name given in Portugal to that Empire, or its Emperor, was that of Prester John, or Presbyter John, as may be seen at large in Joam de Barros Dec. 3. Lib. 4. Diogo de Couto Dec.4 Lib. 10. Nicolas Godinho, *Hist. Ethiop.* Lib. 1. and Damian de Goes, 3 par. *Chron. Reg. Eman.* cap. 6. where he calls that emperor Precious John. [17]

But with their good leave, who gave these Names, I must declare all these were meer Fables concerning this Precious John; for it is now plainly and evidently made out by the Protugueses [sic] who have been there since, and by the Religions of the society [i.e. Jesuits], who travers'd over almost every step of this Ethiopia, and view'd it from End to End, that they found not there the least Footsteps of such Holy Names and Celebrated Titles; and no Man in this Ethiopia makes the least question of this Truth, being wholly ignorant of any such Name there emperor has, and they are surpriz'd when we stile him so, as not finding any thing in all their Language that bears the least Resemblance with this Title of Prester John, or may so much as allude to it; whatsoever the Abyssinian Zagabazo,[18] mention'd by Damian de Goes, as also in this History, as being sent into Portugal with a sort of Embassy, did endeavour to invent, to find out some means of adapting this Name to his Tongue; which is no better grounded, than what F. Lewis de Urreta, in the History of Ethiopia Dreamt, when he said, this Emperor was call'd Baldigian.[19]

It is therefore most certain, and beyond all controversy, that neither this Emperor, nor the Empire from him, has any claim to the Title of Prester John; and tho' Philosophers may be of Opinion, that this controversy about the Name is not Material, for as much as it is what they call, an argument about a Word, however we see that among Learned Men, he often understands Things best, who is most acquainted with the Names, and we shall next show what was the occasion of giving this Name to the King of Ethiopia.

To this Purpose it must be observ'd, that, as is plainly prov'd by F.

Nicholas Godinho, *Hist. Ethiop.* lib.1 Pet. Iarric. in *Thezaurer. Indic. tam.* 2. cap.14 and Patriarch. Alfons. Mendez in *Hist. Ethiop.* lib.1. cap. 1, and 2.[20] the Name of Prester John, or Presbyter John, did belong to a Christian Emperor, who' a Nestorian, and subject in Spirituals to the Patriarch of Babylon, as were those Christians, they call in India, of the Mountains, or of St. Thomas, which may be seen in F. Antony de Gouvea, in his Learned Book he compos'd, of the Journey undertaken to visit these Christians by that great Prelate Don F. Alexius de Meneses.[21]

This Emperor liv'd in the Mountains of Asia, his Sirname being Johanan, deriv'd from the Prophet Jonas, which the Europeans chang'd to John, and it was common to all the Kings of that Monarchy, as that of Pharoah was to the Kings of Egypt; that of Ptolomey afterwards to the same; and that of Cesar to the Roman Emperors. The Addition of Prester is an Abbreviation of Presbyter, and this Title is said to have been given him, on account of a Cross that was always carry'd before him, as is among us before Archbishops.

Now the aforesaid Authors agree, that the giving [of] this Name of that Christian Emperor in Asia, to the King of Ethiopia in Africa, proceeded from the mistake of the Portuguese Peter de Covillam [Pêro da Covilhã], sent with Alfonso de Payva by King John II. of Portugal, in the year 1467,[22] by Land, to discover both India, and that so much talk'd of Christian Emperor call'd Prester John, of whom there was some very dark Knowledge in Portugal, and an earnest Desire of better Information. This Portuguese, in his Return from India to Gran Cairo, hearing much Talk at Adem [Aden] and Suaquem [Suakin], through which he pass'd, of the Abyssine Emperor, who was there nearer to him, as that he was a Christian, carry'd a Cross in his Hand, and that in his Country there were Monasteries of Religious Men; and having heard no News, in all those parts of India he Travell'd through, of any Christian Prince Inhabiting Asia, he concluded there was no occasion for him to proceed any farther in search of what he did not know to have any Being there, being then so near what they told him was to be found in Ethiopia. Thus he perswaded himself he had met with that his King sent him in search of, and that without doubt this same was the very Prester John, so much sought after, and so little known in Portugal.

Upon this Notion, Peter de Covilham went away immediately himself to Ethiopia, first sending an Account from Cairo to King John II. [João II of Portugal] of what he imagin'd he had found, directing several Letters to him by sundry ways. And as it often happens, that pleasing News is rather believ'd than examind'; so this found such a general Acceptance and Approbation, that the Abyssine Emperor of Ethiopia was immediately declar'd to be the Prester John of Asia, first

in Portugal, and afterwards throughout all europe; the true one being thus bury'd in Oblivion, and the supposititious [sic] cry'd up and applauded.

This Mistake was back'd and confirm'd, by the total Extinction of Johannan, or Prester John in Asia, with all his Monarchy; so that not so much as the Name of any Christian emperor reigning in Asia being now brought into Europe, and the Fame of this Christian Monarch, so near to Egypt increasing with the discovery of India, the Europeans had some Colour for their general mistake, absolutely concluding, especially the Portugueses, trading to the Red sea, that this King of Ethiopia was the so much sought after and celebrated Prester John.

Marcus Paulus Venetus [Marco Polo], in his *Itinerary* very much strengthened this vulgar Error, writing, That the great King call'd Prester John us'd to reside at Archico, which is the first Town belonging to Ethiopia, within the Red Sea;[23] but that this is absolutely false we shall see hereafter: Now this Ethiopia we speak of, is as remote from Cathay, where the true Johanan seems to have resided, as Spain is from Peru; for I am of opinion that this Emperor of Asia was that same Christian King that dwelt in Cathay, of whom S. Antoninus, Archbishop of Florence makes mention, and who has been so long, and with so many Toils, and Hazards, in vain, sought after, by the Religious Men of the society [of the Jesuits], who have in India indefatigably traversed immens'd Lands, and unknown Seas, in search of this hidden Monarchy, till at last they came to this conclusion; That there remains nothing at present in all the east, but the bare Names of the Fields, in which this Celebrated Cathay Stodd, and its Emperor Prester John reignd. And yet this Notion is so strongly rooted in some Mens Opinions, that they still expect this hidden Cathay will be found out, and that more particularly among the Portugueses, some of whom are so Credulous as to believe, there is still a great island in our seas, not only Undiscovour'd, but Inchanted; and so they to this Day expect the discovery of the hidden King of Cathay.

## Jerónimo Lobo, A Short Relation of the River Nile

*Date:* 1669

*[Jerónimo Lobo was a Portuguese Jesuit missionary sent in the 1620s to convert Ethiopia to Catholic Christianity. He spent almost two decades in Ethiopia and became intimately acquainted with its language and customs. Lobo was perfectly placed, then, for a refutation of the association between Prester John and Ethiopia, which he attempts in the following excerpt. Lobo argued that the misattribution of Prester John to Ethiopia was the result of*

*Europeans misunderstanding a phrase that Ethiopians shouted to their king: 'Jan Coy' which means 'Oh, my king! 'Adding to this the title of 'priest' affords 'priest Jan', from which Lobo says Europeans mistook Prester John for the Ethiopian emperor.]*

The Abyssine Emperour (vulgarly, though falsly called Presbyter John of the Indies) is Lord of the most ancient and largest Dominions of those many Kingdoms and Provinces into which Africa is divided: this Empire, is the most Easterly part of all Africa, called Ethiopia …

*The Reason why the Abyssine Emperour is called Prester John of the Indies*

That there was anciently in the East Indies a puissant Christian Prince, Lord of many Kingdoms and large Territories, is out of question: being grounded on the authentick authority of good Historians and Authors; as undoubted is it, that at present there is no such Prince; his memory perished many ages since, leaving the extent of his Empire undecided. Both these Assertions are proved by the famous Historian John de Barros in his Decads.[24] And the advance made by the Portuguese into the Indies, assures us, that at present no such Prince is known in those many Kingdoms and Provinces of the East, by them discovered.

This being out of controversy, yet the Emperour of Ethiopia, in the opinion of many, passeth for that famous Presbyter John of the Indies; by this name commonly, though falsly called, by those who pretend much, but have little knowledg of him.

There have not been wanting some late Authors, who upon small grounds, and lesse truth, would maintain this opinion and report, proving by divers Etymologies and interpretations of the word, that the Abyssine Emperour was properly Prester John: But this affirmation being without any appearance of truth; excuseth me from shewing how little it hath; I onely say, that those who have spent some time in Ethiopia know all reported on this subject to be a meer fable; never any Prince of this Empire had that Title, neither is the word known in the whole extent of those Dominions.

That some Probability spread this report through the world That this Emperour was the famous Presbyter John of the Indies; is undeniable: First, his Kingdom being in the Eastern parts, thence, without Examination, if his Empire were properly in the Indies (onely lying betwixt the River Indus and Ganges) the opinion first settled on this Bassis. Secondly, the ancient Presbyter John professing himself a Christian, having for the Embleme of his faith a Crosse in a hand, and when he went forth on a Journey, a Crosse carried before him, being beside a Priest, (all which or the greatest part suites with the Abyssine

Emperour, for that he was by ancient custome a Priest, is reported of him by tradition and their own Annals; for the Crosse in particular, he often carrieth it in his hand, and all there have it in peculiar reverence and devotion) gave apparently this Errour a second rise. Thirdly, Ignorant, in what part of India his Empire was, having often heard of the Christianity of this King and his Subjects, and without any records of the ancient Presbyter John, uninquisitive men concluded him the Abyssine Emperour: Thus mistakes are commonly guilded over with the appearance of truth. We who lived in Ethiopia, reflecting on this, and often discoursing by way of Inquiry, what might most probable beget this opinion, derived it from what I shall here offer; If a thing so obsolete admits any conviction, or what is maintained by common opinion is to be refuted.

Ethiopia hath an ancient and usual Custome for slaves to petition their Masters and subjects their Soveraigne, either in their Ear with an humble and submissive voyce, or at a distance from some eminent place, to tell their greivances, and demand justice against their Oppressors, so placing themselves, as to be most conveniently heard, every one crys as loud as his voyce can reach, in the language of his own Province or Nation. The Portuguese (frequent here) cry '*Senhor, Senhor, Senhor*'; not desisting till their businesse be dispatcht. The Moor crys '*Acid, Acid, Acid*', which signifies the same. The Boor of the Kingdom of Tigere sayes '*Adaric, Adaric, Adaric*'. The Courtier, and those more civilized '*Abeto, Abeto, Abeto*', intimating the same. Others bark like Dogs, howle like Wolves, and by imitating the different cryes of other Beasts, are so understood and known of what place and Province they are.

Those of an higher Province, in the heart of this great Empire, (where many ages these Princes kept their Court) when according to this ancient and usual Custome, they present their Petitions, cry 'Jan Coy' (i.e.) my King: (Jan signifying King, and *Coy* my) which supposed, for the cleerer proof of what I endeavour to evince, you are to be reminded: that the Abyssines affirme their Emperours were Priests, in testimony of that, relate some Miracles wrought by them.[25] That the Abyssines are naturally Wanderers, particularly undertake pilgrimages to the Holy Land, which being not far remote, doth more easily engage them in the journey. This they practise at present, though formerly they did it more frequently.

It is also notorious, that the french, most of any nation of Europe, used the Levantine trade, their concourse was so great, that those Infidels scarce knew any other Europeans, and called all white men (as they still do) *Franks* by a small corruption from the word *Francois*.[26] The French necessarily met many Abyssines particularly in Palestine with whom their discourse was probable about their Nation

and Country: The Abyssines speaking of their King, undoubtedly gave him the most ancient, most usual and most respectfull title of *Jan*: neither is it less probable, that for the greater reverence of the Royal person, they told them their King was a Priest; thence was he concluded *Jan* by title, and by office a Priest: all know that among us *Sacerdote* and *Presbytero* are the same, which the Latines called *Presbyter* and the French *Prester*; this word joyned to *Jan* begets *Prester Jan*, which with small addition is corrupted into *Prester John*, intending the same. The French returning home were likely to relate what they believed and heard in forraigne parts, so spred the report, that the King of the Abyssines was King and Priest *Prester Jan*; there not being then any knowledge of the true Prester John of the indies. This report, set abroad, past current, that this famous Prince was without doubt the emperour of the abyssines, thence at present vulgarly called Prester John of the Indies.

I may without arrogance think the Conjectures and Probabilities on which this Discourse is grounded, above contempt, both from my own observations and experience, and from the approbation of able Judgments, particularly of great Travellers, and those conversant in Ethiopia, who found them agree with their information; if any are dissatisfied with this Tract, let them not condemn the good will that offers it, and take my word to acquiesce in any better proposed.

## Arnoldus Montanus, Atlas Chinensis

*Date:* 1671

*[Arnoldus Montanus (a Latinisation of Arnold van den Berg), was a Dutch teacher and writer of the seventeenth century. Although he himself never travelled beyond Europe, he wrote many geographical texts borrowing from the writings of those who did. In the following excerpt, he relied on members of the Dutch East India Company who had travelled to China and, as such, his geography of China is reasonably accurate. Arnold here describes the western Chinese province of Sìchuān, and says that Prester John lives to the west of this province, positioning him in Tibet. Arnoldus is therefore the first of a small number of writers who associated Prester John with Tibet.]*

Not far from the City *Xefang*,[27] towards the North, is a Mountain call'd *Tafung*,[28] whose Head pierces the Clouds, and sends forth from the top a River, which running down very steep, makes a great noise in the fall; from the top of this being reckon'd sixty Furlongs Perpendicular, you may take a Prospect over all the other Mountains,

and see the City *Chingtu* [Chéngdū]; it extends from the utmost Western Borders of the Province of *Suchuen* [Sìchuān], to *Prester Iohn*'s Countrey, or *Sifan*;[29] and in a continu'd Ridge, reaches to the City *Guei* [i.e. Guìyáng?]: Out of these Mountains the great River *Kiang* takes its first Original.[30]

## Johannes Nieuhof, Embassy from the East-India Company

*Date:* 1673

*[Johannes Nieuhof was a Dutch member of the East India Company who travelled to China in the 1650s and became a Sinological authority upon his return to Europe. In the following excerpt, Nieuhof places Prester John in western China, in a province that is in reality very sparsely populated due to its rugged, mountainous terrain and harsh climate.]*

*China,* situated in the farthest part of *Asia,* borders toward the East, South, and West, upon the great *Indian* Sea, and is call'd *Tung* by the *Chineses,* which signifies *Easterly.*[31] And on the North it is separated from the Kingdoms of *Ninche*[32] and *Nicolhan*,[33] by that Famous Wall which was made by those of *China* against the Invasion of the *Tartars.* Higher up toward the North it has for Frontiers the Kingdom of *Taniju*,[34] and a Wilderness call'd *Samo*,[35] which separates the North side of this *China* from the Kingdoms of *Samahan* [Samarkand] and *Cascar* [Kashgar]. Upon the other Provinces situated toward the South, joyn the Kingdoms of *Prester-Iohn, Geo* [?], (which by the *Chineses* are call'd by one common Name *Sifan*)[36] as also *Tibet, Laos,* and *Mien.*[37] Likewise *China* reaches as far as *Brangale* [Bengal?], and to some part of *Tartary,* and the Mountains of *Damascus,* which separates it from *Tartary* and *India.*

[…]

Amongst the Northern Dominions is this *Xensi* [Shǎnxī], which is very great, chiefly situated toward the West in 30 Degrees, and borders upon the Kingdoms of *Prester-Iohn*, *Casker* [Gānsù], and *Tibet*, which are call'd by one Name in the *Chinese* Tongue, *Sifan.*

[…]

This Territory of *Sucheu* [Sìchuān] is very large and fruitful, which Eastward bordereth upon Huquang,[38] southward upon *Queicheu* [Gùizhōu], North-East and by North upon *Xensi* [Shǎnxī], North-West

upon *Prester-Iohn*'s Countrey, Westward upon *Tibet,* and southward upon the Province of *Iunnan* [Yúnnán].

*[This would make the identification of Prester John's country roughly the equivalent of the modern Chinese province of Qīnghǎi, which is very harsh, mountainous territory at a high altitude on the Tibetan plateau, and which is for the most part unpopulated.]*

## Hiob Ludolf, Aethiopian History

*Date:* 1681

*[Hiob Ludolf was a seventeenth-century linguist and orientalist with a particular interest in Ethiopia. While on a research trip in Rome, he befriended an Ethiopian Christian who taught him about Ethiopian language and culture. Based on this knowledge, Hiob constructed the following refutation of the association between Prester John and Ethiopia. Like earlier writers, Ludolf argues that he was more correctly a historical Asian monarch, and blames Pêro da Covilhã for the mistaken application of the name Prester John to the Ethiopian king.]*

*Book II, Chapter I – Of the Kings of the Abessines, their Various Titles, their Names and Arms.*

The King of the Habesines has been hitherto known to the Europeans by no other Title than that of Presbyter John, which was first given him by the Portugueses. The Occasion thus: Peter the Son of Peter, Prince of Portugal, returning home from Venice, carried along with him a Treatise of Paulus Venetus [Marco Polo], being a Discourse of the Affairs of India; wherein many things were more especially and magnificently written concerning Presbyter John: which as the Portuguese Chronicles witness, was the chief Motive to prosecute the Design of the Indian Navigation, that Henry the Son of John the First [João I of Portugal] had begun.[39] He being induc'd into a certain belief that there might a Compass be fetch'd about Africa, by which means the Passage would be open into India, as having read in the Relations of the Ancients, that Hanno the carthaginian, sailing out of the Streights of Gibraltar, came at length through the Ocean into the Red Sea, and sent a Navy into the unknown Atlantic Sea, to discover the Shore of Africa.[40] Whose Design John the Second pursuing, to bring the Discovery to Perfection, sent two Portugueses, Skilful in the Arabic Language, Peter Covillian, and Alphonsus Payva,[41] to try what they could do; among other things, giving them

more especially in charge, to find out that so much celebrated Presbyter John, that most wealthy King as he was reputed, either in Asia or India, hoping easily to obtain a League and friendship with him, as a Christian Prince.[42] They Travell'd through Egypt several ways into India, and after a long and vain Search for Prester John, Payva came home;[43] but Peter more inquisitive, at length in some of the Ports of the Red Sea, heard much talk of a most Potent Christian King of the Abessines, that us'd to carry a Cross in his Hands; as also of his subjects, who were great Favourers if not Followers of the Christian Religion. Believing it therefore to be of little moment, whether this famous Monarch liv'd in Asia or in Africa, he certainly perswaded himself, as being ignorant both in History and Geography that this was the Prince so much sought after; and thereupon gave intelligence thereof to his own King, while he himself continu'd his Journey into Ethiopia, with a resolution to take a view of this Celebrated Presbyter Emperor, who was look't upon as another Pope. These glad Tidings the Portugals sooner believ'd, than consider'd; and so spread the News all over Europe for real Truth; Credulity gaining easily upon those that are ignorant of Foreign affairs and Kingdoms. and now the Learned Men began to enquire into the Cause and Original of this same appellation. as it is the Custom generally to search for true Originals of feigned Names, and wrest them after a strange manner to make good their own Opinions.

We find among the most Eminent Historians, that formerly there was a certain Christian Prince, that reign'd in the utmost Parts of Asia, not far from the Kingdom of Tenduc[44] toward Cataya [Cathay]; who being of great Power and Fame, was by the Neighbouring Persians, to signifie his remarkable Sanctity, call'd Prester-Chan, or Prince of the adorers; that is to say, Christians; or as Scaliger will have it, *Fristegiani*, the Apostolic Prince.[45] However the Name is to be pronounc'd, we shall not contend; but this is certain, that the unskilful Vulgar having learnt the Name of the Italians, who at that time were great Traders into the East, call'd him by the Italian Name of *Preste*, or *Pretegianni* or *Giovanni*: after which, the same Name prevail'd with all the People of Europe.

Thus his Name and his Fame continued for some Ages, though under much obscurity. For few understood, that that same Asiatic *Prester Chan* was[46] driven out of his Kingdom by Cenchi or Cynges [Chingis], King of the Tartars. Therefore for this reason, because the Portugueses were greatly mistaken, first in the Name, and secondly, in the thing it self; that Name was given to this African King, which belong'd to a King reigning some Ages since in Asia, some Thousands of Miles distance.

Now after this sir name prevail'd among the Habessinians

[Ethiopians], and yet there could be found no Cause or Signification of the same, they began to find out words Foreign, and altogether from the purpose to uphold their own Vanity, as *Gian Belul*, *Beldigian*, *Tarasta Gian*: one among the rest exquisitely Critical, perswading himself that *Prete-Janni* was faulty, would have it to be *Pretious-John*, as a Title more becoming the Person of a King.[47] This Epithete the Pope once assum'd, and that he might not be thought to be in an Error, many there were that obstinately maintain'd it; so that Tellezius had much ado to instruct them better.[48] It would be too tedious to rehearse the Originals of these Chimera's: only we must take notice of this by the way, that *Beldi-gian,* and *Taras-ta-gian* were the figments of Men of no Credit; but *Gian-Belul* derives its Original from the Cries of Petitioners, with which they address themselves to the King.[49] But setting aside all these idle Derivations, and Surmises, which are ridiculous even to the more ingenious sort of Habessines themselves, most certain it is, that the Name of the King of the Habesines is no more in the Ethiopic language than *Negus,* King; But in the Titles which both he himself, and all the Habessines use, he is call'd *Negusa Nagast*; King of the Kings of Ethiopia, in Reference to some Rulers of Provinces, and Viceroys that are under him, who are also dignified with the Title of *Negus*, or *Nagash.* In the Amharic Dialect he is saluted *Hatzeghe,* which they render 'Supreme Prince'; and given to none but to the Prince, as the French in their Address use the word *Sir.* Hence the Arabian word *Aticlabassi,* or as Ortelius[50] pronounces it, *Asiclabassi*; compounded from the forementionʼd word, *Hatzeghe*, the Arabic Article *El*, and the National name *Habesh*, *Hatzeg-el-Habesh*; or Supream Prince of the Habbessines. When they add the Proper Name, they cut the word short, *Hatze,* as *Hatze-Susneus, Hatze-Jacob; Hatze-Basilides.* The Persians and Indians honour him with the Title of *Padeshah*, which is given to none but the greatest Kings in the Empire; as to our German Empire; the Kings of India, Persia, Turky, and China, who have several Governours and Princes under their Subjection, which the common People call Emperors; and as the King by Tellez Is call'd in the Portugal Language, *O Emperador Abexim*, Emperor of the Abessines: which his Title seems to Intimate, in regard a King of Kings may not unproperly be call'd an Emperor. Neither shall we derogate in the least from his Title, as being so highly Eminent above all the Barbarous Kings of Africa, both for his Power, and the Honour of being a Christian. Among the Ancient Arabians, the Kings were always call'd *Najashi*, as the Kings of Aegypt were call'd *Pharo's*; and the Roman Emperors *Caesars.* But as to the Proper Name of the King; it was the ancient Custom, that at his first coming to the Crown, he was saluted by the Souldiery with a new Name, for lucks sake; and generally the change was made of the Christian Name. However they

do not cast it quite off, as the Popes do, but assume both together. Thus *Zar-a-Jacob* in an Epistle to the Tome of Councils, writes himself *Zar-a-Jacob,* and our Imperial or Inauguration Name Constantine.[51]

## Philippe Avril, The Dalaè-lama is the Famous Preste-Jean

*Date:* 1692

*[Philippe Avril was a Jesuit professor of philosophy and mathematics in Paris who was sent in the late seventeenth century to assist a group of Jesuit missionaries who were already in Běijīng. In the following excerpt, Avril makes the argument that Prester John was the Tibetan Dalai Lama, a figure who had only recently come to European attention.]*

It appears by what i have said of the Kingdom of *Tanchut* [next to Tibet],[52] that the *Dalaè-lama* is without all contradiction that same Famous *Preste-Iean,* concerning whom Historians have written so variously. In a word, since that Title, and whatever many authors have said of him, can be attributed to no Person more justly then to this *Dalaè-lama,* 'tis more natural to acknowledge him in this Country of *Asia,* where he has always been, then [sic] to seek him out in *Habyssinia* [Ethiopia], where he never was.

'Tis also an understanding Observation of *F. Kirker*,[53] who in his Polite Piece, touching the Particulars of *China,* after he has describ'd the Manners and Customs of the different people that encompass that wide empire, demonstrates the ingenuity of the *Portugueses* in the search which they have made after this so extraordinary Prince, and so well known in the world under the Name of *Preste-Iean,* of whom they publish'd so many particular things.

To clear this part of History which is altogether perplex'd, and at the same time to undeceive those who may have suffer'd themselves to be prepossess'd by all those fabulous Tales that have been utter'd abroad as real Truths, they are to understand, that while the *Portugueses* were in search of the *East-Indies, Iohn* the Second [João II of Portugal] sent one of his Subjects, by Name *Peter de Coulan* [Pêro da Covilhã], to discover 'em by Land, and particularly charg'd him to inform himself where that same *Preste-Iohn,* so much talk'd of in *Europe* reign'd, yet not knowing in what part of the World his Empire lay.

The design of *Iohn* the second was to have made an alliance with him, perswaded as he was, and according as he had heard it reported, that he was a potent Prince, and profess'd the Christian Religion. In obedience to his Princes Orders *Peter de Coulan* pass'd into *Asia,* and

penetrated a great way into *India,* where he learnt many things of great importance and curiosity: But notwithstand all his diligence, he could not hear of *Preste-Iohn,* nor meet with any body that could tell any Tidings of him; only coming to *Caire* [Cairo], in his return homeward, he heard, that in *Ethiopia,* beyond *Egypt,* there reign'd a Rich and Potent Prince. Who every time he shew'd himself in publick, had a Cross carry'd before him, and that he was a declar'd Protector of the Christians.[54]

Now in regard these Marks agreed with the Character that had been given him, to discover the Prince he was in search of, there needed no more to perswade that Traveller into a belief of what he most of all things in the world desir'd to know. So that he made no farther doubt but that *Preste-Iohn* was that same Monarch of the *Abyssins,* and he believ'd it so truly, that he wrote his Discovery into *Portugal* without any farther Examination. Nor were they more scrupulous at *Lisbonne,* where the news was receiv'd with a great deal of joy and applause. Upon which they who sail'd into *Africa* the following years, prepossess'd with this Opinion, contributed not a little to confirm it by their Relations; so that as false as it was, the Mistake was soon spread all over *Europe.*

Now though this same stupid Error was refuted by several learned persons, and tho the falshood of it might be easily discover'd by what *Damian de Goez, Nicolas Godigno* and *Baltazar Tellez*[55] have written of it, as being perfectly inform'd of every thing that concern'd *Ethiopia,* where they had been long resident, yet I cannot forbear to observe with *F. Kirker,* that the *Latin* Chronology of the Kings of *Habyssinia* makes no mention of *Preste-Iohn;* and therefore all the Authors of any Antiquity that have taken occasion to mention him, still place him in *Asia,* tho they cannot agree in what part of the World he reign'd, no more then they can about the original of his Name.

A Modern Author imagins *Preste-Iohn* to be a Corruption of *Preste-Arkan,* that is to say, *King of the Adorers.* Others with as little reason derive it from the *Latin, Pretiosus Iahannes.* Some would have it to be, that as the Name of *Caesar* was common to all the *Roman* Emperours, so *Iohn* was no less common to these Princes we speak of; and that they bore that Name in honour of the Prophet *Ionas,* to which the *Eastern* people afterwards added the Title of *Priest,* or *Preste;* not that these Kings were really dignifi'd with the Sacerdotal Character, but because they had usually a Cross carry'd before 'em, as Protectors of the Christian Religion.

But *Scaliger*'s Conjecture seems to me more probable then all the rest, where he says, That *Preste-Iean* was a corruption of the *Persian* Word *Prestegiani,* which signifies *Apostolic;* that it was very likely that the *Europaeans* who traffick'd into the *East,* having heard confusedly of

that Prince, whom they heard frequently call'd *Padischah Prestegiani,* gave him by chance the Name of *Preste-Iean,* which sounded very like to *Prestegiani,* of which they understood not the real signification.[56]

As to the part of *Asia,* where *Preste-Iean* reign'd, methinks there is no reason to doubt of it, considering what the Ancient Authors have written. For upon a strict examination it will be found, that the greatest part of these Authors place him in that vast Country which extends it self from the *Mogul,* towards the *East* and *North* as far as *China:* Which is that which St *Antonius* sufficiently makes appear in the Third Tome of his History,[57] where speaking of the *Tartars,* he observes that their Emperor sent a puissant Army under the command of his Son, to subdue those people that inhabited the lesser *India;* which Conquest being accomplish'd, the victorious *Tartars* advanc'd against the Christians who inhabited the Greater, or the Upper *India;* but that their King call'd *Preste-Iean* by the Vulgar, having drawn his Forces together, march'd against 'em, and overthrew 'em.

This is also that which *Paul* the *Venetian* [Marco Polo], who knew the Country better then any body, tells us more distinctly, as having resided several years at the Court of the Great *Kan* of the *Tartars:* For the Kingdom of *Tenduc,* or as others read it, *Tanchut,* this Kingdom, i say, where *Marcus Paulus* places *Preste-Iohn,* is still in being, if we may believe those who have travell'd through it, and lies between *China* and the empire of the Great *Mogul* [in india]. Which perfectly agrees with the sentiments of those who have made *Preste-Iohn* to reign in *Kitay;* seeing that as I have already observ'd, it is not to be thought that by *Kitay* the Ancients meant *China* only, or some particular Kingdom; it being sufficiently probable that they comprehend under that name all the Country that lies between *Obi* [the Ob River, in western siberia], the *Volga,* and *China,* as the *Muscovites* understand it at this day.

The only thing that seems to raise some doubt in what we have said concerning *Preste-Iohn* is this; that *Preste-Iohn* and the people under his subjection were Christians, whereas the Country that lies between the *Mogul* and *China* is now full of *Mahometans* and Idolaters. But certain it is that things were not always in the same posture as now they are, but that the Christian Religion once flourish'd in these barbarous Countries, where now Infidelity prevails.

'Tis known that st *Thomas,* after the apostles had made a division of the Universe among themselves, departed from *India,* to cultivate those Unbelievers; that he penetrated into the most remote parts of it, and dy'd at length at *Meliapor* [Mylapore, in India]. And some Authors have written, not without some probability, that *China* it self receiv'd the Gospel by the Ministry of that Holy Apostle. However it were, there is no question to be made, in my Opinion, but that the Faith

might be dispers'd in Countries more on this hand toward the *West,* in regard there is a Country which the *Moors,* profess'd Enemies of the Christians, still in derision call *Kiaferstan,* or the Country of the Infidels,[58] the inhabitants of which are call'd Christians of St *Thomas* to this day; who tho they have forgot their Ancient Christianity, yet still retain certain Customs that sufficiently demonstrate what Religion their Ancestors profess'd. For beside that they baptize their Children, they have painted in their Churches, and beare upon their Foreheads three Crosses of a Red Colour, being a Tincture squees'd out of *Sanders-Wood.*

But tho it might be true, that presently after the Birth of Christ, the Gospel might not be promulgated in these Barbarous Countries, yet certain it is that it was preach'd there in the succeeding Ages. The celebrated Monument that was found in *China* in 1625. near the City of *Siganfu*,[59] is an invincible proof of what I say. For it is observ'd, that Six hunder'd years after Christ, the *Syrian* Priests having scatter'd themselves all over *Asia,* had divulg'd the Christian Law in the Extremities of the World, where their Zeal for the Glory of God drew 'em. And *Hayton,* a Christian Author, who was of the Blood Royal of the Kings of *Armenia*,[60] testifies, That in the Thirteenth Age [i.e. thirteenth century], *Tartary* was full of Christians; that *Cublai* [Kublai] their Emperor embrac'd the Christian Faith; and that his Brother who had been a Christian for some time, enter'd into a Religious War for the sake of Religion, against the *Caliph* of *Babylon,* won *Palestine* from the *Mahometans,* reinthron'd the King of *Armenia,* being expell'd his Territories by those cruel Enemies of Christianity, restor'd to peaceful freedom those people whom the Infidels had proscrib'd and banish'd, and rebuilt a great number of Churches at his ow[n] costs and charges; and all this at the sollicitation of the Princess his Wife, who glory'd in being descended from one of the Three Kings that came to adore Christ, when but newly born.

This was the same *Haeton,* who wrote to St. *Lewis* [Louix IX, King of France], when he lay in *Cyprus* at the time of his first Expedition for the recovery of the Holy Land. St. *Antonin* also, in whose History[61] may be seen that Letter of the *Tartar* Prince, observes that St. *Lewis* sent him, under the Character of Ambassadors, two Monks of the Order of St *Dominic,* with very rich Presents, among which was a piece of the true Cross, and a Canopy of State of an extraordinary value, upon which were embroider'd in Gold, the principal Mysteries of the Life of Christ.[62]

This happen'd in the year 1256. and about forty or fifty years after, that is to say, toward the beginning of the fourteenth Age, several *Franciscan* Monks being sent to the Great *Kan,* visited all parts of the Kingdom of *Thibet,* which is next to that of *Tanchut,* and

converted a great number of Infidels and Pagans.[63]

Father [Antonio de] *Andrada*, a *Porteguese* Jesuit, travelling also into these Countries in 1624. reports that the people had still an Idea of the Christian Mysteries, tho confus'd and corrupted; that they us'd among themselves a sort of Confessiion, feeble Remainders of the Faith which they had formerly embrac'd, and which by degrees was utterly extinguish'd.

There is no doubt then, after what has been said, but that the Kingdom of *Tanchut,* not having been always idolatrous as now it is, the *Delaè-Lama* who at present resides there, may be the true successor of the famous *Preste-Iohn,* who reign'd there formerly; and it is no less probable, that that same Monarch happening to change as the Religion corrupted, became sometime after Head of a new Religion which degenerated at last into Idolatry.

'Tis true, that he is not a Temporal Prince; but that may be the effect of the Wars and Revolutions that happen in all Kingdoms. However it were, he is still in high veneration among all the *Eastern* people, who acknowledge him for the Head of their Religion. And that which is farther remarkable is this, that he bears the Name of *Lama,* which in the *Tartar* Language signifies a Cross:[64] and the *Bogdoi,* who conquer'd *China* in 1644.[65] and who are subject to the *Dalaè* in all matters of Religion, wear always Crosses about 'em, which they call *Lama*'s also, and for which they have an extraordinary Respect, which sufficiently demonstrates that they were formerly instructed in those Mysteries, of which that sign is in some measure an eternal Memorial.

## François Petit de la Croix, Histoire de Genghizcan

*Date:* 1710

*[François Petit de la Croix was a late seventeenth-century French orientalist who spent a decade in the Middle East, and later became the Arabic interpreter attached to the French court. De la Croix and his fellow orientalist friends met every Wednesday afternoon to discuss the East. The following excerpt provides a rare glimpse into how modern readers could react to the* Prester John Letter, *which de la Croix claims was written fraudulently by Nestorians in Asia.]*

This same Oungcan,[66] King of the Keraites, was that Prince who made so great a noise in the christian world towards the end of the twelfth century, under the title and quality of the Prester John, of Asia, which name the Nestorians first styled him by. And there are yet to be seen circular letters sent by him to christian Princes during his

reign; one of which was to Pope Alexander III. one to the King of France, one to the Emperor of Constantinople, and one to the King of Portugal, all writ in a very lofty style; in which he seemed to design to give to those Princes to whom they were addressed, an idea of his greatness, and to persuade them that he was the greatest Monarch that ever Asia produced. There is yet remaining in French a copy of the letter he writ to King Lewis [Louis] VII the father of Philip Augustus [Philip II of France]; but it seems by the writing not to have been writ above three hundred years [ago], and it begins with these words, 'Prester John, by the Grace of God, the most powerful Monarch, King of all Christian Kings, wisheth health, etc.'. [67]

This letter is filled with an account of this Prince's magnificence: he boasts of his great wealth, the vastness of his dominions, in which he comprehends India, and all the inhabitants of Gog and Magog: he proudly speaks of seventy Kings, who serve him, and are his subjects; he vaunts of the tribute he extorts from an Isrealitish King, who is Lord of many Lords, Dukes, and Jewish Princes; he invites the King of France to come and see him, promising to give to him great dominions, and also to make him his successor. He proceeds in this letter to name the different sorts of people and rarities that are in his Kingdoms. In fine [in the end], he omits nothing that may conduce to his advantage, and speak him a most powerful Monarch. He calls himself a Priest, because of the sacrifice of the Altar, which, as such, he performs; and King, as he executes justice and right as sovereign Judge. He speaks of St Thomas, conformable to the fabulous notions of the Indians; and at the conclusion of his letter, desires the King to send him some valiant Cavalier who is of the French generation. These are his words.

But 'tis not difficult to discover that this letter is a counterfeit, and that it was not writ by Ounghcan. The Nestorians who in that country were very numerous, having established themselves there in the year 737. by the means of the missionaries of Moussoul and Basra, were the authors of this letter; having by means of their emissaries spread a report over all Christendom, that they had converted the greatest part of the people in Scythia, and also the King himself, who was the most mighty and powerful King that ever reigned there; that his Conversion was so sincere, that he was become a Priest, and had taken the name of John. They added these circumstances, to render their fabulous stories more like truth; and composed these vain letters, to make that zeal of their sect more respected and commended, by their having gained so great a Prince to christianity.

All the use we can make of these letters from our history, is to prove that the world was at that time persuaded, and believed that this King was a very great Prince, and likewise both a Christian and a

Priest. There is also found a letter of the Pope's,[68] who styles him a most holy Priest; yet in reality there is not the least appearance that he was a christian, but only that he permitted christians to live under him, and that some of his subjects had embraced the christian religion; nay more, that he even suffered them quietly to have Bishops. What is really true, is, that this King was the most considerable Can [khan] of the kingdom of Caracatay [Kara-Khitai], and that a great number of sovereign Princes paid him tribute. Abulfarage [Bar Hebraeus] observes, that he was sovereign over all the eastern Turks; but we must take notice, that in his time the greatest part of the Tartars were called Turks, tho' they were not of the country of Turquestan.[69]

**Johann Lorenz von Mosheim, An Ecclesiastical History**

*Date:* 1741

*[Johann Lorenz von Mosheim was an eighteenth-century German ecclesiastical historian. In this excerpt, von Mosheim tries to account for all the various opinions of Prester John.]*

A great revolution in Asiatic Tartary, which borders upon Cathay, changed the face of things in that distant region about the commencement of this century [i.e. the twelfth century],[70] and proved, by its effects, extremely beneficial to the Christian cause. Towards the conclusion of the preceding century, died Coiremchan, otherwise called Kencham,[71] the most powerful monarch that was known in the eastern regions of Asia; and while that mighty kingdom was deprived of its chief, it was invaded, with such uncommon valour and success, by a Nestorian priest, whose name was John, that it fell before his victorious arms, and acknowledged this warlike and enterprising *presbyter*, as its monarch. This was the famous Prester John, whose territory was, for a long time, considered by the Europeans as a second paradise, as the seat of opulence and complete felicity. as he was a *presbyter* before his elevation to the royal dignity, many continued to call him *presbyter John*, even when he was seated on the throne;[72] but his kingly name was Ungchan. The high notions the Greeks and Latins generally entertained of the grandeur and magnificence of this royal presbyter, were principally owing to the letters he wrote to the Roman emperors Frederic I, and to Emanuel emperor of the Greeks, in which, puffed up with prosperity and flushed with success, he vaunts his victories over the neighbouring nations that disputed his passage to the throne, describes, in the most

pompous and extravagant terms, the splendour of his riches, the grandeur of his state, and the extent of his dominions, and exalts himself far above all other earthly monarchs. All this was easily believed, and the Nestorians were extremely zealous in confirming the boasts of their vain glorious prince. He was succeeded by his son, or as others think, his brother, whose name was David,[73] though, in common discourse, he was also called Prester John, as his predecessor had been. The reign of David was far from being happy, nor did he end his days in peace; Genghiz Kan, the great and warlike emperor of the Tartars, invaded his territories towards the conclusion of this century, and deprived him both of his life and his dominions.

[…]

The rapid and amazing victories of the great Genghizkan, emperor of the Tartars, gave an unhappy turn to the affairs of the Christians in the northern parts of Asia, towards the conclusion of this century [i.e. the twelfth century]. This heroic prince, who was by birth a Mogol, and whose military exploits raise him in the list of fame above almost all the commanders either of ancient or modern times, rendered his name formidable throughout all Asia, whose most flourishing dynasties fell successively before his victorious arms. David, or Ungchan, who, according to some, was the son, or, as others will have it, the brother, but who was certainly the successor of the famous Prester John, and was himself so called in common discourse, was the first victim that Genghizkan sacrificed to his boundless ambition. He invaded his territory, and put to flight his troops in a bloody battle, where David lost, at the same time, his kingdom and his life. The princes, who governed the Turks, Indians, and the province of Cathay, fell, in their turn, before the victorious Tartar, and were all either put to death, or rendered tributary; nor did Genghizkan stop here, but proceeding into Persia, India, and Arabia, he overturned the Saracen dominion in those regions, and substituted that of the Tartars in its place. From this period the Christian cause lost much of its authority and credit in the provinces that had been ruled by Prester John and his successor David, and continued to decline and lose ground from day to day, until, at length, it sunk entirely under the weight of oppression, and was succeeded in some places by the errors of Mahomet, and in others by the superstitions of paganism. We must except [i.e. allow], however, in this general account the kingdom of Tangut, the chief residence of Prester John, in which his posterity, who persevered in the profession of Christianity, maintained, for a long time, a certain sort of tributary dominion, which exhibited, indeed, but a faint shadow of their former grandeur.

**Remedius Prutky, Travels**

*Date:* 1752

*[Remedius Prutky was a Czech Franciscan friar who visited Ethiopia in the year 1752. He is the only source on record to have asked an Ethiopian emperor if he had ever heard of the title Prester John, by which he was known in Europe.*[74] *The Emperor responded in the negative. Remedius then proceeds to put forward his own unique etymological hypothesis for how the term Prester John became applied to Ethiopia, explaining that Prete Ianni is a corruption of the Portuguese for black (preto) and the Arabic for springs (aʿyūn), thus indicating black people who live near the Nile's fountainhead.]*

*[Chapter 17]*

Everything that occurred I have noted down in different chapters with an account of the character, way of life, and faith, in Ethiopia. King Jasu [Iyasu II, Emperor of Ethiopia] by that time had two sons, future rulers of the kingdom. I had often heard in Europe of the name *Prester John*, and also read about him in books, and i enquired about its origin, and whether by chance the title still persisted in the imperial line.

Everyone denied knowledge of it, but as I spent some time there I told the emperor himself that he was entitled in Europe Prester John, and begged him to pronounce upon it. He was astonished, and told me that the kings of Abyssinia had never been accustomed to call themselves by this name. I therefore deduce some other origin for this name, which today is wrongly applied to the emperors of Ethiopia.

*Chapter 18 – Derivation of the Imperial Title Prester John …*

In personal conversation with the inhabitants, and indeed with the Emperor himself, I was told that the title Prester John, contrary to European opinion, is never applied to the Emperor of Abyssinia; I therefore consulted books and manuscripts, *Asia*, the treatise of Dom Joannes Barros,[75] Christian adviser to the King of Portugal, and accounts of eastern conquests by land and sea, and found the country called *Zanquebar*, which borders on one of the main rivers of Africa the *Niger*. This river starts in Nigritia and after flowing for 800 leagues enters the sea through various mouths in West Africa, at the end of which lies the Cape of Good Hope discovered by the Portuguese; Ptolemy calls it *Raptus*, and, whereas its course lies otherwise than to the south, its furthest springs are in the territory of the ruler of

Abyssinia, in the mountains of *Graro*, where it bears the name of *Obin.* The old Portuguese writer [de Barros] calls the country of Abyssinia by another name, *Aian*, that is, the territory of the sources and springs of the Nile, called by the Arabs the eye of *Aian*.[76] Now, because the dwellers near those springs are all black, the first Portuguese and Spanish conquerors of the Indies gave to the kingdom of Abyssinia the name *Prete*, which sounds the same in their language as *black* [*preto* = black]. This then is the origin of the name Preteiani: the peoples of Abyssinia who dwelt by the sources of the Nile being black, the name *Preteiani* was given by the Spanish and Portuguese to the black inhabitants of that area; then by bad translation from Portuguese to French the name Presbyter Joannes was coined.

This however is a title which the Emperor of Abyssinia has never borne and never wishes to hear, especially when you consider that he is not a priest, but a layman who has been advanced to the imperial title, and that the glory which surrounds him is owed to himself alone for the constant revolts which he has had to subdue. Though the realm itself is of the richest and most extensive, he cannot enforce his taxes from such widely dispersed provinces, each governor follows his own judgement far removed from the imperial palace, and the emperor collects but little of the annual revenue. Of any other source of income he is without knowledge, and although the veins of the land abound in ores of all sorts, gold, silver, iron, etc. in great quantity, yet for want of suitable managers, which he lacks, the richest emperor of olden times is now become poor, and the most splendid is now become wretched. Neither iron, nor precious metal, nor metal such as copper, lead, tin, mercury, have they the wit to find, in a land that flows with milk and honey; much the less can they mine silver or gold, beyond what they find on the surface of the earth. The Abyssinians are lazy, ignorant, idle, over-bearing, they labour long at nothing, they go naked and gorge themselves on raw flesh, and they aspire to nothing further: with all their laziness they hold gold itself in little or no esteem, despite its plentifulness, as I shall describe later.

## Voltaire, Essay on the Customs and the Spirit of Nations, and on the Principal Deeds of History, from Charlemagne to Louis XIII

*Date:* 1756

*[Voltaire is a well-known intellectual figure of eighteenth-century France who was famous for his anti-Catholic philosophical views, his emphasis on personal freedoms and freedom of religious choice, and his delightfully acerbic wit and clever satires. In the following excerpt, Voltaire, like many*

*of his contemporaries, places Prester John as a historical king in medieval Asia vanquished by Chingis Khan.]*

There was a powerful state between these lands [i.e. Mongolia] and those of China; this empire was that of a khan whose ancestors had abandoned the vagabond life of the Tartars for building towns in the manner of the Chinese. He was even known in Europe; it is to him that we first gave the name of Prêtre-Jean. Some critics have wished to prove that the proper word is Prête-Jean, although there was certainly no reason to call him either Prête [Ready] or Prêtre [Priest].

What is true is that the reputation of his capital, which made a [great] rumour in Asia, excited the greed of the merchants of Armenia; these merchants were of the ancient communion of Nestorius. Some of their religious men began a journey to them; and in order to make them recommendable to the Christian princes who were at that time doing battle in Syria, they wrote that they had converted this great khan, the most powerful of the Tartars, whom they had given the name of Jean, and that he had likewise wished to receive priesthood. So began the fable which arose of the Prêtre-Jean in Ethiopia, and one gave this name to that black prince who is half schismatic Christian and half Jew. However, the Tartar Prêtre-Jean succumbed to the forces of Genghis in a great battle. The victor seized his states and elevated himself to the position of sovereign of all the Tartar khans, under the name of Gengis-khan, which signifies king of kings, or grand khan.

## Johann Gottlieb Georgi, Russia, or, A Compleat Historical Account of all the Nations which Compose that Empire

*Date:* 1780

*[Johann Gottlieb Georgi was a German naturalist, geologist and geographer who spent much of his life journeying throughout Russia and Siberia. In the following excerpt, Georgi puts forward the unique argument that Prester John, the head of the Nestorian church, and the Tibetan Dalai Lama were all the same person.]*

There are two personages that have for several centuries been very famous in the world, Prester John and Dalai Lama. Three travellers, Carpini, Rubruquis [William of Rubruck], and Marco Paolo, first made Europe acquainted with Prester John, but they all have different opinions about him.[77] The first represents him as an Indian king; the second as a Christian king of the Tartarian hord Naiman, whom he

believed to be likewise Christians. But both their accounts are certainly wrong.

The Portuguese having found a way to India by sea round Africa, discovered a certain Christian prince in Abyssinia, whom they took for Prester John, notwithstanding [that] the three before-mentioned travellers had placed him, not in Africa, but in the remotest parts of the East, in the neighbourhood of China. This circumstance they overlooked.

But we must first proceed to give some accounts of Dalai Lama. He lives in a pagoda on the mountain Potala,[78] which, according to the Jesuit Gaubil, is under 29° 6' northern latitude, and 25° 58' western longitude from Pekin [i.e. Beijing].[79]

His followers explain the nature of his immortality in the following manner: that his soul, after the death of his body, passes into another human body which is born exactly at that time, and this man is the new Dalai Lama. (Others relate that they keep a young man in the pagoda during the life of the Dalai Lama, who is to succeed him).

Almost all the nations of the east, except the Mohammedans, believe the metempsychosis as the most important article of their faith; especially the Indians, the inhabitants of Tibet, and Ava [?], the Perguans [?], Siamese, Mongouls, all the Kalmucs [Kalmyks], and the greatest part of the Chinese and Japanese. According to the doctrine of the metempsychosis, the soul is always in action, and never at rest; for no sooner does she leave her old habitation but she enters a new one. The Dalai Lama being a divine person, he can find no better lodging than the body of his successor; or, properly not the soul, but the Fo residing in the Dalai Lama which passes into his successor:[80] and this being a god to whom all things are known, the Dalai Lama therefore is acquainted with every thing that happened during his residence in the former body. Thus, at least, the thinking people of that religion would perhaps explain their metempsychosis. The far greater part of the worshipers of Lama, however, do not require reason and arguments for what they believe; but take all in a literal sense, and examine no farther; having the same notion of the Lama as the Mongouls had of the Pope.

Prester John, of whom we have spoken above, in like manner gave rise to many conjectures; the greatest part of which are so improbable as not to deserve refutation. We will begin therefore at once by that method which seems to promise the best elucidation of the matter.

The name Prêtre Jean, or Juan, was mistakenly heard by the first Europeans that visited these regions. And their fancy working upon it, formed many extravagant ideas which were received and cherished in Europe. These travellers perceived a certain resemblance between the sound of a word in the Mongolian and Tibetan languages with that of

a French, Italian, and Portuguese word. Unused to the study of languages, they imagined that such words as had a similar sound must have likewise the same signification in the language of Tibet and of the Mongouls which they bore in some of the European. This idea being once received, many fantastical etymologies and fables naturally arose, as that about a certain Indian Johannes Presbyter, etc.

Among all the etymologies, that of Scaliger seems to be the most probable.[81] This name, according to his opinion, came from India, and properly was Preste Jehan (Preste Giani; for Gehan in the Persian and Indian languages signifies *the world*), which is as much as to say, *a messenger of the world;* or *an universal apostle.* The Nestorian patriarchs always appropriated to themselves the pompous title of Catholicus, which signifies, as every one knows, almost the same thing.

Now, if we can admit that the missionaries of the Nestorians came into these countries (which almost every competent judge in such matters will allow) then the Nestorian patriarch and Prester John are one person; at least according to the rules of etymology. And this Prester John being a Christian, he must have been the Catholicus of the Nestorians; or perhaps only a bishop sent by the Catholicus, who in these distant regions assumed a greater title than was strictly due to him.

In the pursuit of these enquiries we shall find this Prester John, or this Nestorian Catholicus, to be likewise one and the same with the Dalai Lama.

Prester John was heard-of earlier than the Dalai Lama. In the country of the Mongouls, where Prester John is said to have formerly resided, they knew nothing about a Dalai Lama before the time of Kajuk-khan [Güyük], one of the descendants of Tschingis-khan. Among the Europeans, Pere Andrada is one of the first who mentions him, about the year 1624, and Bernier speaks of him as a strange novelty.[82]

It deserves to be remarked, that the old writers, whilst they take notice of the Nestorians and Prester John, say not a syllable of the Dalai Lama. But no sooner are they become acquainted with the Dalai Lama, than they cease all mention of Prester John and the Nestorians in Mongolia and Tibet.

All these circumstances seem sufficiently to prove that the Catholicus, Preste Gehan, and Dalai, are only one person.

**Benito Jerónimo Feijóo y Montenegro, Reflexions upon History**

*Date:* Before 1764

*[Benito Jerónimo Feijóo y Montenegro was a Spanish monk and scholar who encouraged sceptical inquiry into many myths and legends. He was an important proponent of the Enlightenment in Spain. His discussion of Prester John serves as the final text in the present work because of his explicit argument that Prester John had never existed. This should not be taken as a suggestion that all commentators after Feijóo disbelieved in Prester John; rather, there are many examples of eighteenth and nineteenth century writers who still echoed the conclusions of previous writers, that Prester John was a king who had once existed in Asia. By the same token, there were probably some before Feijóo who believed Prester John did not exist and never had, but if so they are hidden to history.]*

*Prester John*

It is wonderful, considering how slight our information is of Prester John of India, that even clidren [sic] and rustics are acquainted with his name, although it is not as yet known with any certainty, who this prince is, where he reigns, nor why he is called by this name. When the Portuguese received the first information that the king of the Abyssinians professed himself a Christian, and that his subjects called him Belul Gian, or as others have it, John Coi;[83] they imagined this was Prester John, and their sentiment was adopted, and passed current in all Europe. When afterwards people came to know, that these words in the Abyssinian language, had a different signification from what had been put upon them, and meant the same as *precious king*, or *my king*; and reflecting also, that those who gave the first accounts of Prester John, placed him in Asia, and not in Africa, this opinion began to lose ground with men of letters, and to be considered as erroneous. But the doubts respecting who this Christian prince is, in what part of Asia he reigns, and why he is called Prester John, still remain: and with regard to this matter, there are so many opinions, that the enumeration of them would be tedious; but in one thing they all agree, which is, that this prince is of the Nestorian sect; although in other points relating to him they differ widely: some say his empire was extinguished by the Tartars; others, that the name of Prester John was given to the Great Mogul, on account of his assuming the title of *Schah Gehan*, which signifies *king of the world*; and that, by equivocal and forced interpretation, schah Gehan was construed into Prester John. such a variety of opinions has raised in me some suspicion, whether all that has been related of this Christian king of Asia, is not entirely fabulous. If, upon inquiry, it shall appear that Paulus Venetus [Marco Polo] was the first who gave an account of him, and that all other authors have taken what they said upon the subject solely from him: I say, if this should appear to be the case, it

will afford a new motive of distrust, and it would be laughable enough, to find that authors have been beating their brains, and scrutinising all the corners of the globe in search of Prester John, when no such man exists, nor ever did exist in the world; at least, it is not probable, that he exists at present, because in all the modern voyages and travels that I have seen, I don't meet with the least mention of him; and if there really was such a man, authors in that way, would not have thought him unworthy of their notice.

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1 &c. is 'etc.'.

2 saga Za Ab, often rendered Zagazabo by Western authors, was an Ethiopian ambassador who attached himself to the Portuguese mission of Francisco Álvares in Ethiopia in 1520, and accompanied him on his return to Portugal in 1527. When in Portugal, saga Za Ab was interrogated by religious authorities about the perceived doctrinal deviations inherent in Ethiopian Christianity, but was eventually freed. Later, he penned an account of Ethiopian Christianity for a European audience, which was subsequently published in 1540 by Damião de Góis under the title *Fides, Religio Moresque Aethiopum,* a book which proved to be both popular and controversial in its own day. (De Góis was hounded by the Inquisition, alienated by his family, imprisoned in horriffic conditions, released, and later murdered probably at the instigation of his inquisitorial enemies). For our purposes, this book of Saga Za Ab put forward a hypothesis that became popular in early modern accounts of Prester John: that the term Prester John derives from the Ethiopic term *Belul Gian,* meaning 'Precious John'. See Elisabeth Hirsch, *Damião de Gois: The Life and Thought of a Portuguese Humanist, 1502–1574* (The Hague, 1967), pp. 208–20; Jeremy Lawrance, 'The Middle Indies: Damião de Góis on Prester John and the Ethiopians', *Renaissance Studies*, vol. 6, no.3 (1992), pp. 306–24.

3 Probably Marcus Antonius Coccius Sabellicus, a late fifteenth- early sixteenth-century Venetian scholar whose most famous work was the 1504 world history entitled *Enneades sive Rhapsodia historiarum.*

4 For Jan Huygen van Linschoten, see Appendix 1 at p.290.

5 Luís de Urreta (?)

6 I found no mention of Prester John whatsoever in the 1543 printing of Petrus de Natalibus' *Catalogus Sanctorum et Gestorum Eorum.*

7 For Otto of Freising, see above pp. 44–5.

8 For scaliger, see pp. 225–6.

9 The *Prester John Letter* is printed above on pp. 67–91. For the French traditions, see below at p. 316.

10 Purchas is correct here. Mandeville certainly did borrow from the *Prester John Letter*, for which see above pp. 199–203.

11 Tenduc is actually Tangut, the name of a Mongolic group defeated by Chingis Khan early in the Mongol conquests, but Marco Polo mistook this for a place name, and so Tenduc was interpreted as a plain somewhere in Asia, a misunderstanding that permeated many of the early modern sources.

12 For Scaliger, see above, pp. 225–6.

13 For Ong Khan (i.e. Toghrul), see above at p. 157, n.11.

14 For William of Rubruck, see pp. 162–5. For George, see p. 189.

15 Prior John was indeed a naval captain in the British fleet at the time of King Louis XII of France (i.e. the late fifteenth century). Heylyn is to my knowledge the only author to raise Prior John, whom the French incorrectly called 'Pragian', as an

analogy for the misunderstanding that led Europeans to place Prester John in Ethiopia. For Prior John, see Robert Southey, *The British Admirals* (London, 1840), vol. 2, pp. 152–5

16 On this, see above at p. 213.

17 These references can all be followed in Appendix 1. For João de Barros, see p. 288. For Diego de Couto, see the same entry as João de Barros. For Nicolão Godinho, see p. 292. For Damião de Goes, see p. 287.

18 For Zagazabo (i.e. saga Za Ab), see p. 236, n.2.

19 For Luís de Urreta, see the entry in Appendix 1, below on p. 291.

20 These references can be followed in Appendix 1. For Nicolão Godinho, Petrus Jarricus, and Afonso Mendez, see p. 292.

21 Anthony de Gouvea was a Portuguese traveller who made several visits to Persia in the early seventeenth century. I have not had access to the account of his mission, a rare work of 1606 titled *Jornada do Arcebispo de Goa Dom Frey Aleixo de Menezes Primaz da India Oriental.*

22 For Pêro da Covilhã, see Francisco Álvares above, pp. 217–18.

23 I am unsure why Téllez described Marco Polo as claiming that Prester John was in Ethiopia, which is certainly not the case (see Marco Polo, above on pp. 178–87). Perhaps Téllez had access to a copy of Marco's work that had been doctored by a modern scribe to show Prester John in Ethiopia instead of Asia, but this is conjecture. Téllez's 'archico' is clearly Hārar Jugol, a major commercial centre in eastern Ethiopia.

24 For which, see below at p. 288.

25 This argument, that the mistaken attribution of Prester John to Ethiopia was because of confusion involving the phrase 'Jan Coi' ('Oh, my king' in Amharic) is not unique to Lobo, but was also put forward by others, including James Bruce as late as 1790. See Appendix 1, p. 298.

26 This is true. The word *faranjī* in Arabic was used to denote any westerner, although technically it meant only a 'Frank'. Equivalent terms moved from Arabic to Amharic, Persian, Thai, Malay, Khmer, Malayalam, and Tamil.

27 i.e. Xīféng, then a separate city, but which is now part of Guìyáng, capital of Guìzhōu province and currently one of the poorest cities in China.

28 i.e. Dàfēng ('Big Peak'), the tallest of the Qiónglái Mountains in Sìchuān, and part of a smaller group of mountains known as Sìgūniáng Shān.

29 i.e. 'Western Regions' (*xīfāng*). In modern Mandarin, the term *xīfāng* is used to refer to 'the West' (i.e. the US, Britain, etc.), but in this instance, we assume west of Sìchuān was meant, meaning Prester John was placed in Tibet.

30 i.e. the Yangtze, which is known in Chinese as the Cháng Jiāng, 'Long River'.

31 Dōng is 'east' in Mandarin

32 Ninche is an obscure name for a region that has today been subsumed into the Chinese province of Hēilóngjiāng and to its north in Russia.

33 Probably in the area of modern Korea (*Hán* indicating Korea).

34 Taniju probably refers to the Tannu Uriankhai, a tribe of western Mongolia that did in fact form a sort of buffer state between Qīng China and the various Muslim states to the west.

35 i.e. 'desert' in Chinese: *shāmò*

36 See above at p. 248, n.29.

37 Mien is northern Vietnam.

38 Húguǎng is a province that no longer exists, having been subdivided into two provinces during the Qing dynasty, namely Húběi and Húnán.

39 Commonly known as Henry the Navigator.

40 Hanno the Navigator did indeed explore the African coast in the fifth century B.C.E.

41 For Pêro da Covilhã and Afonso de Paiva, see above at pp. 217–18.

42 For the embassy of Pêro da Covilhã, see above at p. 213.

43 In fact, de Paiva died on his journey.

44 Tenduc is a misunderstanding of Tangut, which is actually not a place but the name of a Mongolic tribe. This mistake was made by Marco Polo, for which see above on p. 180, n.33.

45 For scaliger, see above, at pp. 225–6.

46 Ludolf includes a footnote here: 'scal[iger], in his *Notes ad Comp. Ethiop.* But by what Authority he writes that the Ethiopians were beaten out of Asia by the Tartars, I cannot apprehend'.

47 For Belul Gian, see at pp. 236–7.

48 For Téllez, see at pp. 241–4.

49 For this 'Jan Coy' hypothesis, see above at pp. 245–6.

50 Abraham Ortelius was a well-known sixteenth-century geographer and cartographer.

51 Zara Yaqob, emperor of Ethiopia from 1434 to 1468, with the throne name Constantine I.

52 Earlier writers used Tenduc/Tangut as a vague place name based on the initial misunderstanding of Marco Polo, for which see above at p. 180. Later in this excerpt, Avril clarifies that Tangut is 'next to Thibet'.

53 For Athanasius Kircher, see below at p. 295.

54 Avril is correct here; Pêro da Covilhã did travel to India and return via Cairo, only to then identify the Ethiopian king as Prester John. For this, see above at pp. 217–18.

55 For Damião de Góis, see pp. 287–8; for Godinho, see p. 292.

56 For Scaliger, see above at pp. 225–6.

57 Presumably the *Chronicon partibus tribus distincta ab initio mundi ad MCCCLX* of st Antoninus (1389–1459), to which I have not had access.

58 *Kāfr* is Arabic for 'infidel'.

59 i.e. the Nestorian stele in Xī'ān, erected in 781, buried in 845, and rediscovered in 1625. It details the arrival of Nestorian Christianity in China in the early seventh century. Avril's 'Siganfu' is *Xī'ān Fŭ*, i.e. Xī'ān prefecture.

60 i.e. Hayton of Corycus who died c.1320 and penned an account of the Orient titled *La Flor des Estoires d'Orient* which is preserved in the *RHC, Arm.*, vol. 2

61 Presumably the *Chronicon partibus tribus distincta ab initio mundi ad MCCCLX* of St Antoninus (1389–1459), to which I have not had access.

62 Compare Jean de Joinville, see above at p. 192.

63 William of Rubruck discusses Tibet but never claims to have visited it. Odoric of Pordenone, however, did claim to have visited Tibet, and he is presumably meant here; if so, the date is off by 20 years or so. If John of Montecorvino is meant, the date is roughly correct, but there is no indication that he went to Tibet, let alone converted any Tibetans. See John McGregor, *Tibet: A Chronicle of Exploration* (London, 1970), p. 16

64 'Lama' designates a Tibetan monk. This purported 'cross' etymology is unknown and presumed false.

65 it is clear from context that the Manchus are meant here, since they conquered China in 1644, ushering in the Qīng dynasty. However, the word 'Bogdoi' here is unexplained. The only possibility I can fathom is that it is a corruption of *dōngběi*, meaning 'north-easterners', a term sometimes applied to the Manchus. The conjecture that they were subject to the Dalai Lama is, of course, false.

66 For Ong Khan (i.e. Toghrul), see above at p. 157, n.11.

67 This is the *Prester John Letter*, for which see above at pp. 67–91.

68 Pope Alexander III's letter, which is found above at pp. 94–6.

69 Bar Hebraeus (a.k.a. Abu'l Faraj) is printed above at p. 170.

70 The English translation is here discussing the twelfth century, but the Latin original reads 'saeculo vero XI'. [in the eleventh century]. It is clear from subsequent discussions that the twelfth century is meant, and 'saeculo XI' was a typo.

71 Von Mosheim is here confusing two separate things: the Coir Chan of Marco Polo (which was already a corruption of the title *gürkhan*) and the Keu Chan of William of Rubruck, which refers to Güyük Khan. See above, at pp. 162–5.

72 [Mosheim has a note:] The account I have here given of this famous *presbyter,* commonly called Prester John, who was, for a long time, considered as the greatest and happiest of all earthly monarchs, is what appeared to me the most probable among the various relations that have been given of the life and adventures of that extraordinary man. This account is moreover confirmed by the testimonies of co[n]temporary writers, whose knowledge and impartiality render them worthy of credit: … [he refers to William of Tripoli, Otto of Freising, William of Rubruck, and Alberic de Trois-Fontaines]. It is indeed surprizing [sic], that such authentic records as these should have escaped the observation of the learned, and that so many different opinions should have been advanced concerning Prester John, and the place of his residence. But it is too generally the fate of learned men, to overlook those accounts that carry the plainest marks of evidence, and from a passion for the *marvellous* to plunge into the regions of uncertainty and doubt. [There follows an account of Pêro da Covilhã identifying the Ethiopian emperor as Prester John, and the subsequent scholarly controversy regarding his location. As to William of Tripoli, I have been unable to find any reference to Prester John in his *Notitia de Machometo* or *De statu Sarracenorum* as edited by Peter Engels (Würzburg, 1992). This leads me to suspect that a later copy, perhaps an early printed edition, had been doctored to include Prester John in William's discussions of eastern Christians, but this is speculation].

73 For King David, see above at pp. 157–9.

74 Except perhaps Charles VI in the early fifteenth century, for which see Appendix 1, p. 284 or Jerónimo Lobo, as above on pp. 245–6.

75 For João de Barros, see below at p. 288.

76 *A'yūn* means both 'springs' and 'eyes' in Arabic.

77 These authors can be found above: John de Plano Carpini at pp. 152–4, William of Rubruck at pp. 162–5, and Marco Polo at pp. 178–87.

78 The Potala palace in Lhasa, which sits atop a small mountain, was the chief residence of the Dalai Lama until 1959.

79 Antoine Gaubil (1689–1759), French Jesuit missionary to China.

80 In Chinese, *Fó* refers to the Buddha, or his spiritual essence.

81 Scaliger is printed above at pp. 225–6.

82 António de Andrade, a Portuguese Jesuit, was in 1625 the first European to visit Tibet. François Bernier was a French doctor and traveller who spent a significant period of time in northern India in the 1660s.

83 For Belul Gian, see above at p. 236, n.2. For Jan Coi, see pp. 245–6.

| Text | Date | Details |
|---|---|---|
| *De Adventu Patriarchae Indorum* | Mid.12th C. (?) | Printed above from Zarncke, *Abh.1*, pp. 837–43. Translation is my own. No other published translation known. |
| Odo of Rheims, *Epistola* | Mid.12th C. (?) | Printed above from Zarncke, *Abh.1*, pp. 845–6. Zarncke took his edition from Jean Mabillon, *Vetera Analecta* (1665), which I have not had access to. The manuscript traditions are unknown to me. Translation given is my own. No other published translation known. |
| Otto of Freising, *De Duabus Civitatibus* | 1157 | Printed above from A. Hofmeister (ed.), in *MGH, SS. RGUS*, vol. 45 (Hanover, 1912), pp. 363–7. Translation is my own. A translation of the complete work can be found in Charles C. Mierow (trans.), *The Two Cities: A Chronicle of Universal History to the Year 1146* (New York, 2002). For the dating, see Hofmeister, pp. xii-xvi. |
| The *Prester John Letter* | c.1165–70 | See Appendix 2 below, pp. 299–320. |
| Pope Alexander III, *Epistola* | 27 Sept. 1177 (?) | Printed above from Zarncke, *Abh.1*, pp. 941–4. Translation is my own. Two other published translations are known: 1) Alexander Wylie, *Chinese Researches* (Taipei, 1966), pp. 25–6; and 2) Nicholas Jubber, *The Prester Quest* (London, 2005), pp. 530–3 |

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| Geoffrey of Breuil, *Chronica* | c.1181 | Not printed above. This consists of a short notice in a chronicle about all the kingdoms that existed at the time, one of which was that of Prester John, whose name was apparently given to him on account of his humility (*humilitatis causa presbyteri sibi nomen aptavit*). Geoffrey also mentions 'Quis-ut-Deus', the father of Prester John according to the B and C interpolations of the *Prester John Letter* (see above, pp. 84, 86): O. Holger-Edder (ed.), *MGH, SS.*, vol. 26 (Hannover, 1882), p. 202. No translation known. Of note is that the edition was made from two manuscripts of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. |
| Roger of Howden, *Gesta Regis Henrici II et Ricardi I* | After 1191 | Not printed above. A short mention of Pope Alexander III's letter to Prester John appearing under the year 1178: F. Liebermann (ed.), in *MGH, SS.*, vol. 27 (Hannover, 1885), p. 98. No translation known. |
| Gerald of Wales, *De Vita Galfridi Archiepiscopi Eboracensis* | Late 12th C.? | Not printed above. A minor rhetorical reference to Prester John, where one party in an argument was accused of being so prideful and arrogant that he was like Prester John: J.S. Brewer (ed.), *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera* (London, RS, 1873), vol. 4, pp. 357–431, here p. 425. No translation known. |
| *Annales Colonienses Maximi* | Late 12th C. (?) | Not printed above. A short notice in a chronicle that the patriarch of the Nestorians, called here 'Iafelinus', 'preest omnibus quos Nestoriana heresis ab ecclesia separavit, cuius prelatio per Indiam et per regnum sacerdotis Iohannis et per regna orienti magis proxima dilatatur' [is the foremost of all those whom the Nestorian heresy separated from the [Catholic] church; his leadership extends throughout India and throughout the kingdom of John the Priest and throughout the greater part of the neighbouring kingdoms of the east]: Karolus Pertz (ed.) in *MGH, SS.*, vol. 17 (Hannover, 1861), p. 846. |
| *The Elyseus Narrative* | Late 12th C. (?) | Not printed above. This is a short text of legendary nature describing a priest born and raised in India who later goes on a journey to the court of Prester John. The quality of the Latin is poor, and the text is only known in one manuscript edited in Zarncke, *Abh.2*, pp. 122–7. No translation known. |
| *Flores Historiarum* | Late 12th C. (?) | Not printed above. This is a chronicle by many hands that includes a short mention of Alexander III's letter to Prester John. Of note is that the chronicle says that Master Philip was originally an emissary of Prester John sent to Alexander III and not vice versa: Henry Richards Luard (ed.) (London, RS 1890), vol. 2, pp. 92–3. No translation known. |

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| *Continuatio Admontensis* | Late 12th / Early 13th C. (?) – MS written in multiple hands | Not printed above. A short notice of Prester John seemingly sourced from Otto of Freising. It simply notes, under the year 1141, that 'Iohannes presbyter rex Armeniae et Indiae cum duobus regibus fratribus Persarum et Medorum pugnavit, et vicit' [Prester John, king of Armenia and India, fought with the two brother kings of the Persians and Medes, and defeated them]. What is notable is that the year 1141 is given, precisely the year of the Battle of Qatwan (see above, pp. 7–8.). This may be indicative of the chroniclers' close knowledge of Eastern affairs, or a complete fluke: D. Wilhelmus Wattenbach (ed.), in *MGH, SS.*, vol. 9 (Hannover, 1861), p. 580 |
| Wolfram von Eschenbach, *Parzival* | Early 13th C. | Not printed above. A short notice in a fictional work that Prester John was the son of two characters Repanse and Feirefiz: Karl Lachmann (ed.) (Frankfurt am Main, 1994), book 822, ll.21–30, vol. 1, p. 400. Many published translations exist. |
| Jacques de Vitry, *Letter II* | 1217 | Printed above. Translation is my own, from R.B.C. Huygens (ed.), *Serta Mediaevalia*, in *CCCM*, vol. 171 (Turnhout, 2000), ll.433–46, 469–98, pp. 575–8. |
| *Relatio de Davide, Prima Carta* | 1220 or very early 1221 | Printed above. Translation is my own, from Zarncke (ed.), *Abh.2*, pp. 45–56. No other translation known. See also: Jean Richard, 'The *Relatio de Davide* as a source for Mongol History and the Legend of Prester John', in *PJMTLT*, pp. 139–58 |
| *Relatio de Davide, Secunda Carta* | 1220 or very early 1221 | Printed above. Translation is my own, from Zarncke (ed.), *Abh.2*, pp. 57–8. No other translation known. |
| W. and R., *Letter / Relatio de Davide, Tertia Carta* | 1220 or very early 1221 | Printed above. Translation is my own. I have also made the edition given above as a composite, and the full editorial apparatus has been preserved. Sigla refer to: A) the letter of W. and R., as edited in Zarncke, 'Zur Sage vom Priester Johannes', *Neues Archiv der Gesellschaft für ältere deutsche Geschichtskunde*, vol. 2 (1877), pp. 611–5; B) a thirteenth-century manuscript copy of the text edited here for the first time: Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Lat.16079, f.69r; and C) a copy of the text edited by Zarncke before he discovered the letter of W. and R., and which he published as a version of the *Relatio de Davide*, in *Abh.2*, pp. 58–9. This latter edition was made from the thirteenth-century manuscript: St Florian, Stifts-Bibliothek, Ms.XI.220, f.231b. |
| Pope Honorius III, *Epistola* | 12 March 1221 | Printed above. Translation is my own, from Zarncke's edition in 'Zur Sage vom Priester Johannes', pp. 612–3 No other translation known. |

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| Jacques de Vitry, *Letter VII* | 18 April 1221 | Printed above. Translation is my own, from Huygens (ed.), *Serta Mediaevalia*, in *CCCM*, vol. 171 (Turnhout, 2000), ll.1–20, 216–39, 469, 510–629, pp. 624, 633–4, 642, 644–9. No other translation known. |
| *Annales de Dunstaplia* | c.1221 (?) | Not printed above. A chronicle by many hands, whose editor remarks that 'after the year 1221 the entries in each year were probably made during the course or at the end of the year itself' (p. ix). Under the year 1221 is a summary of the letter of Pope Honorius III on King David, and later (p. 69) we see a copy of a letter from Pelgaius to Henry III which contains a copy of the *Relatio de Davide, Prima Carta*: Henry Richards Luard (ed.), *Annales Monastici* (London, RS, 1866), vol. 3, pp. 66–7. No translation known. |
| Ralph of Coggeshall, *Chronicon Anglicanum* | Before 1224 | Not printed above. A short notice in a chronicle regarding the rumours spread about Prester John at the time of the Fifth Crusade. Ralph claimed that Prester John told the Caliph of Baghdad that he would vanquish him and his realm unless the Muslims converted to Christianity. Ralph also claimed that Prester John promised to come to the aid of the crusaders in Damietta and Jerusalem: Joseph Stevenson (ed.) (London, RS, 1875), p. 190. No translation known. |
| *Chronicon Sancti Martini Turonensis* | 1225 | Not printed above. A short mention of King David and the armies of the Fifth Crusade at Damietta. It also mentions that Jacques de Vitry 'publice predicabat, quod David rex utriusque Indie ad christianorum auxilium festinabat, adducens secum ferocissimos populos, qui more beluini Sarracenos sacrilegos devorarent' [publicly predicted that David, King of both Indias, was hurrying to the aid of the Christians, bringing with him the most ferocious peoples, who were devouring the impious Sarracens like beasts]: O. Holger-Edder (ed.), in *MGH, SS.*, vol. 26 (Hannover, 1882), pp. 467–8. No translation known. |
| *Annales Pegavienses* | Before 1227 | Not printed above. This is a short notice stating that in 1202 the Tartars, under their leader King David, son of Prester John, came forth from the mountains of India to destroy foreign lands: George Henry Pertz (ed.), in *MGH, SS.*, vol. 16 (Hannover, 1859), p. 268. This notice was copied almost verbatim a number of times in other works, for which see Zarncke, *Abh.2*, pp. 73–5. |

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| Oliver of Paderborn, *Historia Damiatina* | Late 1220s (?) | Printed above from H. Hoogeweg (ed.), *Die Schriften des Kölner Domscholasters, Späteren Bischofs von Paderborn und Kardinal-Bischofs von S. Sabina, Oliverus* (Tübingen, 1894), pp. 231–2, 258–9, 267–8. Translation is my own. Oliver of Paderborn is also sometimes known by the Latin name Oliverus Scholasticus. A translation of the full work exists: John J. Gavigan (trans.), *The Capture of Damietta* (Philadelphia, 1948), reprinted in Edward Peters (ed.), *Christian Society and the Crusades, 1198–1229* (Philadelphia, 1971), ch.12. |
| Richard of San Germano, *Chronica* | Before 1235 | Not printed above. A notice that the then King of Hungary (Andrew II) sent word to the Pope (Honorius III) informing him of the conquests of Chingis Khan in Russia, but styling him 'rex Dauit, qui presbiter Iohannes dicebatur in uulgari' [King David, who is called Prester John in the common tongue]. Richard also noted that 'Septem anni errant quod de India exiuerat, corpus afferens beati Thome apostoli, et uno die de Ruteis et Plautis occiderant ducenta milia'. [They have journeyed for seven years since they left India, carrying with them the body of blessed Thomas the Apostle, and in one day they killed 200,000 Russians and Cumans]: C.A. Garuffi (ed.), in *Rerum Italicarum Scriptores* (Città di Castello, 1938), vol. 7 (II), pp. 110–11. No translation known. |
| Alberic de Trois-Fontaines, *Chronica* | Between 1232 and 1241 | Printed above. Translation is my own, from P. Scheffer-Boichorst (ed.), in *MGH, SS.*, vol. 23 (Hannover, 1874), pp. 848–9, 853–4, 910–12, 935–6, 941–2. No other translation known. |
| John de Plano Carpini, *Ystoria Mongolorum* | June, 1247 | Printed above. Translation is my own, from Anastasius van den Wyngaert (ed.), *Sinica Franciscana* (Firenze, 1929), vol. 1, pp. 56–60. A translation of the full work can be found in Christopher Dawson (ed.), *Mission to Asia* (Toronto, 1980). |
| C. de Bridia, *Hystoria Tartarorum* (Tartar Relation) | July, 1247 | Not printed above. This is simply a copy of the story John de Plano Carpini relates about how the army of Prester John repulsed the Mongols by setting up images of men and blowing fire through them: George D. Painter (ed. and trans.), in R.A. Skelton, Thomas E. Marston and George D. Painter (eds), *The Vinland Map and the Tartar Relation* (London, 1965), pp. 68–71. |

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| Simon of St Quentin, *Historia Tartarorum* | Late 1240s (?) | Printed above. Translation is my own. The text itself has not survived. However, parts of it were used by Vincent de Beauvais in his immensely popular *Speculum Historiale*. The edition I have used, that of Jean Richard, was based on an extraction of the Simon of St Quentin material from Vincent de Beauvais: Jean Richard (ed.) (Paris, 1965), pp. 27–30, 51–2. See also G G. Guzman, 'The Encyclopaedist Vincent of Beauvais and his Mongol Extracts from John of Plano Carpini and Simon of Saint-Quentin', *Speculum*, vol. 49, no.2 (1974), pp. 287–307 |
| Odo, Bishop of Toscolano, *Letter to Pope Innocent IV* | 31 March 1249 | Not printed above. A short mention that certain envoys from the East announced that Güyük Khan (here called Kickai) 'matrem habuit Christianam, filiam Regis qui vocatur Presbyter Joannes' [had a Christian mother, the daughter of the King who is called Prester John]. Odo also quotes an anonymous letter containing a veiled reference to Prester John: 'Sciatis praeterea quod in terra Indiae, quam sanctus Thomas Apostolus convertit, est quidam Rex Christianus, qui erat in magna anxietate positus inter alios Reges Saracenos. Faciebant enim ei violentiam undique, usque ad illam horam qua Tartari venerunt in illam terram, et ipse factus est homo illorum. Et accepit exercitum suum et exercitum Tartarorum, et invasit Saracenos'. [You should also know that in the land of India, which St Thomas the Apostle converted, is a certain Christian King, who was placed in great strain amongst other Saracen Kings. Indeed, they attacked him from all sides, right up until the hour at which the Tartars came to that land, and he became one of them. And he rallied his army and the army of the Tartars, and invaded the Saracens]: Luc d'Achery (ed.), in *Spicilegium*, vol. 3 (Paris, 1723), pp. 626, 627. No translation known |
| Matthew Paris, *Chronica Majora* | Before 1253 | Not included above. Paris mentions Prester John several times but not in any major capacity. He includes the letter of Alexander III (vol. 2, p. 316), and the letter of Philip the Franciscan declaring Prester John's land to be a Nestorian land (vol. 3, p. 398); he says, based on knowledge from the mission of Andrew of Longjumeau, that Prester John was slain by the Mongols, whose king took his daughter to wife (vol. 6, p. 115). He also says that a monk of Prester John's (an Ethiopian mission?) exhorted Frederick II and the Pope to make peace, so that a united Europe will have a stronger chance of defeating the Mongol threat (vol. 6, p. 115). He then describes the eating habits of this monk and says that he lived 17 days' march beyond Nineve (vol. 6, p. 116). Henry Richards Luard (ed.), *Matthaei Parisiensis, Monachi Sancti Albani, Chronica Majora* (London, RS, 1882), 7 vols. No translation known. |

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| William of Rubruck, *Itinerarium* | 1253–55 | Printed above. Translation is my own, from Anastasius van den Wyngaert (ed.), *Sinica Franciscana* (Firenze, 1929), vol. 1, pp. 205–8, 233–4, 240. The full text is translated with a detailed introduction and footnotes in Peter Jackson (trans.), *The Mission of Friar William of Rubruck* (London, 1990). |
| Matthew Paris, *Historia Anglorum* | Before 1259 | Not printed above. A short notice of Alexander III's letter to Prester John, without any additional information: Frederic Madden (ed.), *Matthaei Parisiensis, Monachi Sancti Albani, Historia Anglorum* (London, 1866), vol. 1, p. 422. No translation known. |
| *Annales Sancti Rudberti Salisburgenses* | 1250s or 1260s? | Not printed above. A short notice in a chronicle by many hands which mentions a Tartar king by the name of Riothan (i.e. Güyük Khan) who 'matrem habuit christianam, filiam regis, qui vocatur Prister Iohannes' [had a Christian mother, the daughter of the king who is called Prister John]: D. Wilhelmus Wattenbach (ed.), in *MGH, SS.*, vol. 9 (Hannover, 1851), p. 790. No translation known. |
| Thomas of Cantimpré, *Bonum Universale de Apibus* | Before 1263 | According to Baum, *Verwandlungen*, p. 155–6 this reference is simply an echo of the claim that the king of the Tartars had had a Christian mother, who was the daughter of Prester John. Baum refers to an edition by Colvener (Douay, 1605), to which I have not had access. |
| Roger Bacon, *Opus Majus* | 1267 | Printed above. Translation is my own, from John Henry Bridges (ed.) (Frankfurt am Main, 1964), vol. 1, pp. 367–9. A full translation: R. B. Burke (trans.) (New York, 1963), 3 vols. |
| A Mongolian report at the Second Council of Lyon | 1274 | Not printed above. This is a document apparently penned by the Mongol ambassadors who were present at the Second Council of Lyon in 1274, which alleges that their 'first lady' (*domina principalis*), Toquz Khatun, was a 'most Christian queen' (*regina christianissima*) and a 'daughter of the most powerful King John of India' (*filia potentissimi regis Indie Iohannis*). My knowledge of this source is from Baum, *Verwandlungen*, p. 162, which makes reference to B. Roberg, *Das Zweite Konzil von Lyon* (Paderborn-München-Wien, 1973), p. 300. I have not had access to this. |

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| Bar Hebraeus, *Chronicon Syriacum* | Before 1286 | Printed above. This text was originally written in Syriac, but because I have no knowledge of Syriac, I have translated from the Latin translation by Paulus Iacobus Bruns and Georgius Guilielmus Kirsch, *Gregorii Abulpharagii sive Bar Hebraei Chronicon Syriacum* (Lipsiae, 1789), pp. 447–9. This Latin translation has received criticism from some Syriac scholars, however I have compared my own translation with E.A. Wallis-Budge's translation from the original Syriac text; although there are differences in style, the meaning is much the same. Those wishing to compare for themselves may refer to E.A. Wallis-Budge, *The Chronography of Bar Hebraeus* (London, 1932), pp. 352–3, and for information about the text generally, see pp. xxxvii-xli of the same volume. |
| *Flores Temporum, Imperatores* | Late 13th C. | Not printed above. A short notice in a chronicle that in 1201 the Mongols killed their lord David, King of India, son of Prester John: O. Holger-Edder (ed.), in *MGH, SS.*, vol. 24 (Hannover, 1879), p. 240. No translation known. |
| *Novellino* | Late 13th C. | Not printed above. A short and fanciful Italian narrative describing an embassy from Prester John to a certain Frederick (presumably garnered from a manuscript of the *Prester John Letter*). In the embassy, Prester John asks Frederick what the most important thing in the world is, and the answer he returns is *misura* (equanimity). They also exchange gemstones: Zarncke, *Abh.1*, pp. 1007–8. No translation known. |
| Marco Polo, *Livres des merveilles du monde* | 1298–9 (?) | Printed above from Luigi Foscolo Benedetto (ed.), *Il Milione di Marco Polo* (Firenze, 1928), pp. 50–2, 60–1, 104–6, 133, 218–20. Translation is my own. Marco's textual traditions are complex; I have used the variant generally considered the earliest; see John S. Critchley, *Marco Polo's Book* (Aldershot, 1992). Of course, many translations of the full text exist. |
| *The Tree of Seth* | c.1300 | Not printed above. This is a short and fanciful text in poor Latin describing a journey of a Christian to the court of Prester John, who is the guardian of a tree with strange properties: Zarncke, *Abh.2*, pp. 127–8. No translation known. |

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| Riccoldo da Monte di Croce, *Itinerarius* | 1300 | Not printed above. This text repeats the familiar story of the Mongols killing Prester John: 'Tunc Tartari fecerunt tres turmas. Vna turma cum Magno Chan occupauit Cathaiam, prouinciam latissimam vsque ad vltimam Indiam, et occiderunt ibi prester Iohannem, et occupauerunt eius imperium, et filius Magni Chan accepit filiam prester Iohannis in vxorem' [Then the Tartars made three squadrons. One squadron, with the Great Khan, occupied Cathay, a most wide province, all the way to farthest India, and there they killed Prester John and occupied his kingdom, and the son of the Great Khan took the daughter of Prester John as wife]: Constantino Tischendorf and Tito Toblero (eds), *Peregrinatores medii aevi quatuor* (Lipsiae, 1864), p. 120. No translation known. |
| William of Nangis, *Gesta Ludovici IX* | c.1301 | Not printed above. This is an almost verbatim copy of what is contained in the letter of Odo, Bishop of Tuscolano, to Pope Innocent IV, for which see above … : M. Bouquet (ed.) in *RHGF*, vol. 20 (Paris, 1840), p. 362. No translation known. |
| John of Monte Corvino, *Epistola II* | 8 January, 1305 | Printed above. Translation is my own, from Anastasius van den Wyngaert (ed.), *Sinica Franciscana* (Firenze, 1929), vol. 1, pp. 348–9. Translation of the full in Dawson (ed.), *Mission to Asia* (Toronto, 1980). |
| Marino Sanudo Toresello, *Liber Fidelium Crucis* | 1307 | Not printed above. An account of Prester John which is almost an exact replica of that of Simon of St Quentin, which is printed above at pp. 157–9: Jacques Bongars (ed.), *Gesta Dei per Francos* (Hanover, 1611), pp. 185–6, 234–5. The full text is translated in P. Lock (trans.) (Aldershot, 2011). |
| Jean de Joinville, *Histoire de Saint Louis* | 1309 | Printed above. Translation is my own, from Noel L. Corbett (ed.) (Québec, 1977), pp. 181–3. Several unsatisfactory translations of the full work exist. |
| Raymond Lull, *Disputatio cum Hamar Sarraceni* | 1309 | Not printed above. Lull equates the Great Khan of the Mongols with Prester John. I have not seen this text myself; my knowledge of it is from Baum, *Verwandlungen*, pp. 194–5. |
| Odoric of Pordenone, *Relatio* | 1330 | Printed above. Translation is my own, from Anastasius van den Wyngaert (ed.), *Sinica Franciscana* (Firenze, 1929), vol. 1, p. 483. Several full translations exist, for example in Sir Henry Yule, *Cathay and the Way Thither* (London, 1866), vol. 1, pp. 1–163, which includes a valuable introduction. |

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| John of Columpna, *Mari Historianum* | from c.1250 to c.1340 (by several hands) | Not printed above. A short notice in a chronicle, that the Tartars killed David, the most powerful king of India, then proceeded to subject various kingdoms, especially the Persian regions: G. Waitz (ed.), in *MGH, SS.*, vol. 24 (Hannover, 1879), p. 280. No translation known. |
| Iordanus de Severac, *Mirabilia* | Between 1329 and 1338 | Not printed above. Iordanus was a traveller who made his way to India, and was one of the first to place Prester John in Ethiopia, adding little further details: Société de Géographie (ed.), *Recueil de Voyages et de Mémoires* (Paris, 1839), vol. 4, pp. 37–65; and translated in Henry Yule (trans.), *Jordanus, A Version of the Mirabilia with Commentary* (London, 1863). |
| Jacob of Verona, *Liber Peregrinationis* | 1335 | Not printed above. Prester John is here represented as leader of Nubia, Ethiopia and Egypt, and he apparently had control over the waters of the Nile: Reinhold Röhricht (ed.), in *Revue de L'Orient Latin*, vol. 3 (Paris, 1895), pp. 163–302, here pp. 190, 218. |
| *Liber Bellorum Domini* | Before 1342 (?) | Not printed above. This appears to be a pedagogical text. It circulated anonymously for a long time, but a case has been put forward for the author as Pierre de la Palu (a.k.a. Petrus de Palude or Peter Paludanus). The date given here is based on de la Palu's date of death, and is therefore tentative. In any case, the section on Prester John is largely based on Jacques de Vitry's *Letter VII*, which is printed above at pp. 130–34. Edited in Ignazio Giorgi (ed.), in the *Archives de l'Orient Latin*, vol. 1 (Paris, 1881), pp. 302–3. For the attribution to Pierre de la Palu, see J.F. Benton, 'Theocratic History in Fourteenth-Century France: The *Liber Bellorum Domini* by Pierre de la Palu', *University of Pennsylvania Library Chronicles*, vol. 40 (Philadelphia, 1974), p. 43 ff. No translation is known. |
| John Marignolli, *Relatio* | c.1350s | Not printed above. John, on a journey throughout the East, noted Prester John in Ethiopia: '[flumen] Gyon, qui circuit terram Ethiopie, ubi sunt modo homines nigri, que dicitur terra Presbiteri Iohannis' [the river Gihon, which encircles the land of Ethiopia, which is called the land of Prester John, where there are black men]: Anastasius van den Wyngaert (ed.), *Sinica Franciscana* (Firenze, 1929), vol. 1, p. 532. For a full translation, see Sir Henry Yule, *Cathay and the Way Thither* (London, 1866), vol. 2, pp. 309–394. |
| Giovanni Boccaccio, *Decameron* | 1351 | Not printed above. Prester John's queen, called *Schinchimurra* by Boccaccio, is mentioned in the ninth novel of the eighth day. She was described as possessing 'a horne in the midst of her posteriores, albeit not visible to euery eye', according to the anonymous English translation of 1620 held in the Yale University Library. |

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| *Der Niederrheinischer Orientbericht* | Between 1350 and 1360 | Not printed above. A legendary tract which intertwines various stories about India, Prester John, the three Magi and St Thomas the Apostle: Röhricht and Meisner (ed.), in *Zeitschrift für deutsche Philologie*, vol. 19 (1887), pp. 1–86. No translation known. |
| Henry of Herford, *Liber de rebus memorabilibus* | 1355 | Not printed above. A derivate account of Prester John which borrowed from the tradition of King David being killed in 1202 by the Tartars (the earliest surviving exemplar of which is in the *Annales Pegavienses*, for which see above at p. 276). Another source which the author calls 'Egkardus' (?) repeating the familiar story of Prester John and his family being killed and maimed by the Mongols before they emerged from Asia, as well as excerpts from Otto of Freising and the *Prester John Letter*. Augustus Potthast (ed.), *Liber de Rebus Memorabilioribus sive Chronicon Henrici de Hervordia* (Göttingen, 1859), pp. 175–5. No translation known. |
| *Eulogium Historiarum* | 1362 or before | Not printed above. A chronicle in many hands which describes under the year 1190 that 'Hoc anno, sicut a pluribus traditur, Tartari regnare coeperunt. Hi enim in montibus Indiae latitantes, David regem Indiae filium Presbyteri Johannis occiderunt, et statim ad depopulationem aliarum terrarum processerunt' [In this year, as is related by many, the Tartars began to reign. Indeed, these men, hiding in the mountains of India, killed David, king of India, son of Prester John, and immediately proceeded to the plundering of other lands]: Frank Scott Haydon (ed.) (London, RS, 1858), vol. 1, p. 388. No translation known. |
| John Mandeville, *Travels* | c.1360s (?) | Printed above. The authorship, date, and even original language of this text remain polemical. The English text of the so-called 'defective' version is reproduced here, as printed by Pynson in c.1496, from: Tamarah Kohanski and C. David Benson (eds), *The Book of John Mandeville* (Kalamazoo, 2007), ll.1716–32, 2190–96, 2391–2753, pp. 66–7, 78–9, 84–93 |
| John of Hildesheim, *Historia Trium Regum* | Before 1375 | Printed above, from ff.21r-22r, 29v-30r of the anonymous English translation of 1510 held at the Cambridge University Library. |
| Jacques de Guises, *Annales Hanoniae* | Second half of the 14th C. | Not printed above. A short notice that the Tartars killed their king, David of the Indies, son of Prester John, in the year 1202: Ernest Sackur (ed.), in *MGH, SS.*, vol. 30i (Hannover, 1896), p. 244. No translation known. |
| Johannes Witte de Hese, *Itinerarium* | 1389 or shortly after | Not printed above. This is a lengthy and fanciful text describing the author's apparent journey to the land of Prester John, and the various marvels seen there: Zarncke, *Abh.2*, pp. 162–71. No translation known. |

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| Henry IV, King of England, *Letter to Prester John* | 20 October 1400 | Not printed above. A letter to the Ethiopian negus under the guise of Prester John to discuss an alliance against the Muslim Mamluks: F.C. Hingeston (ed.), *Royal and Historical Letters during the reign of Henry the Fourth* (London, RS, 1860), vol. 1, no 147, p. 421–2. No translation known. |
| Pierre Bontier and Jean le Verrier, *Le Canarien* | c.1402 | Not printed above. A short notice of Prester John in a work describing the Castilian conquest of the Canary Islands in 1402. It states that East Africa is a good place to hear news about Prester John, because the people from there 'are acquainted with the neighbouring countries and speak their languages': Richard Henry Major (trans.), *The Canarian* (London, 1877), pp. 93–4. |
| Charles VI, King of France, *Letter to Prester John* | 28 August 1406 | Not printed above. I have not had access to this myself, but have relied on Bettina Wagner, *Die 'Epistola presbyteri Johannis'*, p. 664, which refers to fifteenth-century manuscript: Prague, Knihovna Metropolitni Kapituli, MS. H.III, f.27r-30r. Wagner quotes an excerpt from this letter, and also interestingly notes that 'In seinem Schreiben beklagt er die Uneinheitlichkeit und Widersprüchlichkeit der westlichen Kenntnisse über den Priester Johannes und bittet um Aufklärung' [In his letter, [King Charles] complains about the inconsistency and contradictory nature of Western knowledge on Prester John, and asks for clarification]. The Ethiopian emperor was presumably the addressee. No translation known. |
| Konrad von Jungingen, Grand Master of the Teutonic Knights, *Leiter* | 20 January 1407 | Not printed above. I have not had access to this myself, but have relied on Wagner, *Die 'Epistola presbyteri Johannis'*, p. 523, which refers to fifteenth-century manuscript: Berlin, Geheimen Staatsarchiv Preußischer Kulturbesitz, XX. HA StA Königsburg, pp. 287–90. This letter apparently constitutes 'an den Priester Johannes einen dringlichen Appell zur Wiedereroberung des Heiligen Landes und zur Wiederherstellung der Einheit der Kirche' [an urgent appeal to the Prester John for the reconquest of the Holy Land and to restore the unity of the church]. Again, an Ethiopian emperor is presumed to be the addressee. No translation known. |
| Pietro Ranzano, *Annales omnium temporum* | 1407–50 | Not printed above. Ranzano describes meeting one Pietro Rombulo, who apparently spent 37 years at the court of the Ethiopian neguses Yeshaq and Zara Yakob. During that time, he alleges that he made a journey to China and India, and that he identified the rulers of China as Prester John. I have not had access to this source, but my knowledge of it comes from Ulrich Knefelkamp, *Die Suche nach dem Reich des Priesterkönigs Johannes* (Gelsenkirchen, 1986), p. 78–9. |

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| Pope Eugenius IV, *Letter to Prester John* | 15 June 1438 | Not printed above. I have not had access to this source, but know of it from Wagner, *Die 'Epistola presbyteri Johannis'*, p. 212, which refers to Georgius Hofmann (ed), *Epistolae pontificiae ad Concilium Florentinum spectantes* (Rome, 1940), no. 144, pp. 38–40. Once again, an Ethiopian emperor is presumed to be the addressee. |
| Pope Eugenius IV, *Letter to Prester John* | 28 August 1439 | Not printed above. I have not had access to this text but know of it from Wagner, *Die 'Epistola presbyteri Johannis'*, p. 212, referring to the same Hofmann edition. Once again, an Ethiopian emperor is the assumed addressee. |
| *Universi terrigene* | First half of the 15th C. (?) | Not printed above. This is an unedited Latin letter found in London, British Library, Royal 10.B.IX, ff. 32b-33b. The letter is written from the perspective of Prester John, but is seemingly unrelated to the standard *Prester John Letter*. It appears to be a satire on contemporary English politics, perhaps written by a student at the University of Cambridge, since that institution is named several times. I intend to publish an edition and translation of this text at a later date. |
| Jean de Lastic, *Letter to King Charles VII of France* | 3 July 1448 | Not printed above. This letter describes how Jean de Lastic, Grand Master of the Hospitallers, met some Indian monks in Rhodes, who reportedly claimed that Prester John (i.e. the Ethiopian negus) had achieved great success against the Muslims and that it was expected that he was to continue his conquests to Egypt, Arabia, and Syria. I have not had access to this source; my knowledge is from Baum, *Verwandlungen*, p. 259. |
| *Tractatus de decem nationibus et sectis Christianorum* | Before 1453 | Not printed above. This is simply a short notice of the various types of Christians in the world, one of which is the Indians, who are ruled by Prester John, who is summarily depicted according to the *Prester John Letter*: Zarncke, *Abh. 2*, p. 179. No translation known. |
| Antoniotto Usodimare, *Letter* | 1455 | Not printed above. A Genovese traveller in Africa, Usodimare claimed when he was in Gambia that he was in the vicinity of the kingdom of Prester John. I have not accessed this source myself; my knowledge of it is from Baum, *Verwandlungen*, p. 223. |
| Pope Calixtus III, *Letter to Prester John* | 1456 | Not printed above. A letter from Pope Calixtus III to the Ethiopian negus Zara Yakob informing the latter about the defeat of the Ottoman army by the Hungarians at the Battle of Belgrade. I have not had access to this; my knowledge of it is from Baum, *Verwandlungen*, pp. 262–3. |
| *Tractatus Pulcherrimus* | Second half of the 15th C. | Not printed above. A legendary tract describing the various marvels and wonders of India and the kingdom of Prester John. Edition in Zarncke, *Abh. 2*, pp. 174–9. No translation known. |

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| Bertrandon de la Broquière, *La Voyage d'Outremer* | Travelled 1432–3; wrote 1457 | Printed above. Translation is my own, from Ch. Schefer (ed.) (Paris, 1892), pp. 142–7. For a translation of the full work, see Galen Kline (trans.) (New York, 1988). |
| Pope Sixtus IV, *Letter to Prester John* | 13 May 1482 | Not printed above. I have not had access to this letter, but am relying on Wagner, *Die 'Epistola presbyteri Johannis'*, p. 664, which refers to José M. Pou y Marti, 'La leyenda del Preste Juan entre los Franciscanos de la edad media', *Antonianum*, vol. 20 (1945), pp. 65–96, here pp. 85–6. An Ethiopian emperor is presumed to be the addressee. |
| Luigi da Cadamosto (a.k.a. Aloysius Cadamustus), *Navigatio* | 1450s or 60s (?) | Not printed above. A short notice from an explorer detailing that one can hear news of Prester John in Calcutta: Simon Grynaeus (ed.), *Novus Orbis Regionum* (Basel, 1537), p. 62. No translation known. |
| Christopher Columbus, *Notes* | Before 1492 | Not printed above. Christopher Columbus annotated a copy of Marco Polo's book, which has remarkably survived. It contains two annotations concerning Prester John, which echo Marco Polo's characterisation of Prester John as a rich, powerful monarch by the name of 'Ongchan': Cesare de Lollis (ed.), *Scritti di Cristoforo Colombo* (Rome, 1894), vol. 1, p. 252, vol. 2, pp. 452, 454. No translation exists. Special thanks to James Kane for assistance with this source. |
| Hartmann Schedel, *The Nuremberg Chronicle* | 1493 | Not printed above. A world chronicle originally written in Latin but translated into German, which includes a short mention of Prester John and John the Patriarch derived from the *Prester John Letter* and the *De Adventu*. Facsimile edition: Hartmann Schedel, Stephan Füssel (ed.), *Chronicle of the World, 1493 – the Complete and Annotated Nuremberg Chronicle* (Köln, 2001), f.147v. No translation known. |
| Anonymous, *Journal* | 1497–98 | Not printed above. An anonymous journal by one of the participants in the first journey of Vasco da Gama to India. It relates the excitement of the seafarers upon hearing news from Mozambique natives that Prester John's country was not far from where they were, information which 'rendered us so happy that we cried with joy, and prayed God to grant us health, so that we might behold what we so much desired': E.G. Ravenstein (trans.), *Journal of the first voyage of Vasco da Gama, 1497–9* (London, 1898), pp. 22–4. |

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| Girolamo Sernigi, *Letter* | Late 15th / Early 16th C. | Not printed above. A short notice that the people of Calcutta 'have some knowledge of Prester John, but not much, as he is far away'. This is followed by a short description of the doctrines of the Prester John Christians: E.G. Ravenstein (trans.), *Journal of the first voyage of Vasco da Gama, 1497–9* (London, 1898), pp. 134–5. |
| Johannes Boemus, *Omnium Gentium Mores, Leges et Ritus* | 1520 | Not printed above. A description of Ethiopia, and its emperor Prester John, a man who was 'not as the moste of the Ethiopians are, blacke, but white'. I have consulted the 1555 English translation by William Waterman entitled *The Fardle of Facions* as printed in Michael E. Brooks, *Prester John ...* (University of Toledo, Ph.D. Thesis, 2009), pp. 299–302, here p. 300. |
| Pope Leo X, *Letter to King Manuel I of Portugal* | 8 May 1521 | Not printed above. This consists of a letter by the Pope 'super Rebus gestis in mari Rubro, et foedere inito cum presbytero Ioanne rege Aethiopiae potentissimo' [on the Things done on the Red Sea, and on [the possibility of] entering into a treaty with Prester John, the most powerful king of Ethiopia]: Armando Cortesão and Henry Thomas (eds), *Carta das Novas que Vieram a el Rei Nosso Senhor do Descobrimento do Preste João* (Lisboa, 1521), pp. 139–40. Interestingly, in the various other letters written by Pope Leo on the topic of the Ethiopians (on pp. 141–54 of the same edition), he does not mention the name Prester John at all, which suggests that it was a term he was comfortable using only when writing to the King of Portugal, a country so steeped in enthusiasm for Prester John. |
| Francisco Álvares, *Verdadeira Informação das Terras do Preste João das Indias* | 1526/7 | Printed above. The translation I have given is excerpted, with kind permission of the Hakluyt society, from Lord Stanley of Alderley (trans.), *The Prester John of the Indies* (originally 1881), revised by Charles F. Beckingham and G.W.B. Huntingford (London, 1961), vol. 2, pp. 369–71. The edition can be found in Augusto Reis Machado (ed.) (Lisbon, 1943), ch.104, pp. 277–9. |
| Damião de Góis, *The Legacye of Prester John* | 1532 | Not printed above. Lengthy descriptions of relations between Portugal and Ethiopia (Prester John) in the early sixteenth century, with which de Góis was personally acquainted. I have consulted the anonymous English translation held at Cambridge's Emmanuel College Library. The original Latin text is found in Elizabeth B. Blackburn, 'The Legacy of 'Prester John',' *Moreana*, vol. 4 (1967), pp. 37–98. |

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| Saga Za Ab, *Fides, religio moresque Aethiopum* | 1540 | Not printed above. On Saga Za Ab, an Ethiopian who journeyed to Portugal with Francisco Álvares in 1527, see footnote x on p. y above. I have not had access to this work myself, but many early modern authors cite it. I know of no modern edition or translation; although notorious in the sixteenth century, the work is now exceedingly rare. The book was published by Damião de Góis and sometimes circulates under his name. |
| Sebastian Münster, *Cosmographia* | 1544 | Printed above. This text was originally written in German in 1544, but I have used the translation and abridgement entitled *A Briefe Collection and compendious extract of straunge and memorable thinges, gathered out of the Cosmographye of Sebastian Munster* (London, 1574). The page numbers are incomplete and poorly arranged; the section I have quoted on Prester John begins three folios from the conclusion of the text. |
| Leo Africanus, *Description of Africa* | 1550 | Printed above. Originally written in Italian in 1550, I have used John Pory's English translation of 1600: Robert Brown (ed.), *The History and Description of Africa* (London, 1896), p. 1031 ff. |
| John Bale, *The Image of Both Churches* | Before 1552 | Not printed above. Prester John summarily referred to as an Asian monarch, one of the 'innumerable sectes of perdicion vnder the romishe pope … whiche with their execrable tradicions and rules banished Christ and his pure doctrin for euer'. A copy held in the Henry E. Huntington Library and Art Gallery. |
| João de Barros, *Décadas da Ásia* | 1552–63 | Not printed above. De Barros discusses Prester John in two capacities. The first is an instance in which King João III of Portugal received an embassy from the West African king of 'Benij' about a powerful king in Africa by the name of Ogané. Because of certain superficial similarities (that he was powerful, carried a cross, and so on), João assumed Ogané to be Prester John: This can be found in Decade I, published in 1552, which can be found in facsimile edition in *Da Ásia de João de Barros e de Diogo de Couto* (Lisboa, 1973–5), Decada I, pp. 181–4. This section is also available in English translation in G.R. Crone (trans.), *The Voyages of Cadamosto* (London: 1937), pp. 126–8. The second discussion of Prester John by de Barros occurs in Decade III, penned in 1563. This consists of a more lengthy discussion, and presents the standard case for Prester John being an Asian monarch, not Ethiopian. This second section can be found in the above facsimile edition, Decada III, pp. 359–368. No translation known for this second part. |

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| Richard Eden, *Decades of the New Worlde* | 1555 | Not printed above. A brief description of Prester John in Ethiopia: Edward Arber (ed.), *The first Three English Books on America* (Westminster, 1895), pp. 43–498, here pp. 50–1, 339, 374, 385. |
| Fernão Lopes de Castanheda, *Historia do Descobrimento e Conquista da India pelos Portugeses* | Before 1559 | Not printed above. This is a short notice of Prester John informed by a reading of Marco Polo's *Travels*. No English translation exists (an English translation was made in 1582 of Book I, but the section on Prester John occurs in Book III): [editor not provided] (Lisbon, 1833), 7 vols, here book 3, ch.96, vol. 3, pp. 320–2. |
| Gaspar Correia, *Lendas da Índia* | Before 1563 | Not printed above. A derivative account of the journey of Pêro da Covilhã: Henry E.J. Stanley (trans.), *The Three Voyages of Vasco da Gama and his Viceroyalty, from the Lendas da India of Gaspar Correa* (London, 1869), pp. 7–9. |
| Antonio de Torquemada, *The Garden of Curious Flowers* | 1570 | Printed above from pp. 61, 56, 62 of the anonymous English translation of 1600 held in the Henry E. Huntington Library and Art Gallery. |
| Guillaume de Salluste de Bartas, *Sepmaine* | 1578 | Not printed above. A poem which includes the intriguing lines:<br>'The sparkling Desarts of sad *Libya,*<br>*Zeczec, Benin, Borno, Cano, Nubia,*<br>And scalding quick-sands of those thirsty Plains,<br>Where IESVS name (yet) in som reuerence raigns;<br>Where *Prester Iohn* (though part he *Iudaïze),*<br>Doth in somsort devoutly *Christianize'*.<br>I have here quoted the 1611 English translation by Iosuah Syluester which is held in the Henry E. Huntington Library. |
| Joseph Scaliger, *De Emendatione Temporum* | 1583 | Printed above. Translation is my own from Joseph Scaliger, *De emendatione temporum* [editor not given] (Cologne, 1629), pp. 679–80. |
| Edward Webbe, *Travels* | 1590 | Printed above from Edward Arber (ed.) (Birmingham, 1868), pp. 23–5. |

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| Suffridus Petrus, *De Scriptoribus Frisiae* | Before 1597 | Printed above. Translation is my own, from Jacobus Horreus (ed.) (Franequerae, 1699), decas 6, ch.2, pp. 48–50. I am grateful to John Frankhuizen from Leiden Universiteitsbibliotheek for making this text available to me. Two references are known to me regarding Petrus' assertions. The first is from Pierre Bayle, *Historical and Critical Dictionary* (London, 1710), vol. 1, p. 28, which deals harshly with Petrus and says that he gained his information from 'one of those silly Romances that were made in Ignorant Ages'. The second reference is from Richard Brookes, *A Dictionary of the World* (London, 1772), which follows the opinions of Bayle, calling Petrus' assertions 'trifling romances' (this work is devoid of page numbers, but is arranged alphabetically; see the entry 'Abgillus']. |
| Jan Huygen van Linschoten, *Itinerario* | 1597 | Not printed above. Prester John is equated with Ethiopia, but van Linschoten adds the opinion that the title Prester John should rightly have been *Belgian* (i.e. Belul Gian), an opinion originally based on Saga Za Ab (for which see footnote above at p. 236, n.2). Originally Dutch; I have consulted John Wolfe (trans.) (London, 1597), pp. 10–11, 74, 119, 214–15. |
| Giovanni Botero, *The Traveller's Breviat* | 1601 | Not printed above. This is a lengthy description of the people, customs, religion, commerce, and so on, of Ethiopia (Prester John). Botero also mentions the opinion that 'Although the soueraigntie of this prince be very magnificent, powerfull and spacious; yet in truth doth it nothing answere the fame and report of the vulgar': Giovanni Botero, *The Travellers Breviat* (London, 1601; reprinted Amsterdam, 1969), pp. 169–70. |
| Fernão Guerreiro, *Relations* | 1605 | Not printed above. Father Guerreiro writes in support of the now familiar view that Prester John was falsely associated with Ethiopia, that this was a misconception spread by the Portuguese explorers, and that he should more correctly be found in the Far East: C.H. Payne (trans.), *Jahangir and the Jesuits* (London, 1930), pp. 126–8. |
| Richard Johnson, *The most pleasant history of Tom a Lincoln* | 1607 | Printed above from Johnson, *The most pleasant history of Tom a Lincoln* (London, 1631), 6th edn, ch.6, pp. 22–3. |
| George Benson, *A sermon preached at Paules Crosse* | 7 May, 1609 | Not printed above. A sermon containing the suggestion that Europeans should pay a tribute to Prester John for his service in keeping 'the Turk' at bay: Benson, *A Sermon Preached at Paules Crosse* (London, 1609), pp. 70–1. |

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| Jacques de Villamont, *Voyages* | before 1609 | Not printed above. A short notice of Jacobites as Prester John: 'The *Abyssines* are a people of *Ethiope*, that is to say, a part of *Affrica*, and the greater part thereof, by reason of their large scope. Their King is by them called *Negus*, and in the Persian tongue *Prester-Iohn* or Catholik, which *Prester-Iohn* heretofore dwelt in *Tartaria*: neverthelesse he is yet one of the greatest Kinges of the East, and of the greatest power and might in all *Affrica*, and his Kingdome doth extend from the end of Egipt vnto the Indies: This king hath more then fortie kingdomes vnder him': in Morton Eudes (trans.), *Catholique Traditions* (London, 1609), pp. B1v, 28–9. |
| Anthony Munday, *A briefe chronicle* ... | 1611 | Not printed above. An apology for the Belulgian etymology, for which see above on pp … : Anthony Munday, *A briefe chronicle* (London, 1611), pp. 220–22 |
| Luís de Urreta, *Historia Ecclesiastica, Politica, Natural y Moral* | 1610 | Not printed above. The account of Prester John by de Urreta, written in Spanish, contains a lengthy discussion of the legend informed by his reading of Otto of Freising, Marco Polo, Francisco Álvares, and others, concluding that Prester John was originally an Asian monarch descended from the Three Magi in India, and that the attribution to Ethiopia is a false one: Luís de Urreta, *Historia Ecclesiastica* (Valencia, 1610), pp. 83–9. |
| Edward Aston, *The manners, lauues, and customes of all nations* | 1611 | Not printed above. Describes Ethiopia's leader as Precious John or Prestor John, including a short account of the exchanges of Saga Za Ab and Francisco Álvares, as well as several letters between European personages and the Ethiopian negus and his mother. Aston also declares that the crosses in India are evidence that the Ethiopians and St Thomas Christians were one and the same. Edward Aston, *The Manners, lauues, and customes of all nations* (London, 1611), f.A2r, pp. 508–45, 589. Aston declares these letters were translated by Paulus Iouius (i.e. Paolo Giovio), for whom see also above on pp … . |
| Ralph Standish and Ralph Croft, *Journal* | June, 1612 | Printed above from William Foster (ed.), *The Voyage of Thomas Best* (London, 1934), p. 100. |
| Thomas de Fougasses, *Historie of Venice* | 1612 | Not printed above. Here Prester John is styled 'the Persian king': Thomas de Fougasses, *Historie of Venice* (London, 1612), p. 450. |
| Samuel Purchas, *Pilgrimage* | 1613 | Printed above from Samuel Purchas, *Pilgrimage* (London, 1613), book 7, ch.3, pp. 559–60 of the copy held in the Bodleian Library. |

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| John Selden, *Titles of Honor* | 1614 | Not printed above. A lengthy scholarly discussion of the title Prester John, which makes reference to Saga Za Ab, and ultimately comes to the conclusion that Prester John was originally an Asian title. John Selden, *Titles of Honor* (London, 1614), book 1, ch.5, pp. 84–9. (Note that the pagination is incorrect, and proceeds 84, 85, 76, 77, 88, 89, 90). |
| Nicolão Godinho, *De Abassinorum Rebus* | 1615 | Not printed above. A discussion of the name of Prester John concluding that the name was incorrectly applied to the Abyssinian Emperors because Prester John was originally an Asian monarch. Nicolão Godinho, *De Abassinorum Rebus* (Lugduni, 1615), book 1, ch.5, pp. 18–23. No translation known. |
| Petrus Jarricus, *Thesaurum Rerum Indicarum* | 1615 | Not printed above. I have not had access to this text, but know it mentions Prester John because of a mention in Balthazar Téllez, printed above at pp. 241–4. According to Téllez, Jarricus proposed a typical Asian origin hypothesis for Prester John in book 2, ch.15. |
| Pedro Páez, *História da Ethiópia* | 1620 | Not printed above. Another Portuguese missionary to Ethiopia who does not comment on the Prester John legend in any meaningful way: Camillo Beccari (ed.), *Rerum Aethiopicarum Scriptores Occidentales Inediti a Saeculo XVI ad XIX*, vols. 2–3, Christopher J. Tribe (trans.), *Pedro Páez's History of Ethiopia* (Aldershot, 2011). |
| Nathanael Carpenter, *Geographie ...* | 1625 | Not printed above. A short mention of 'the *Abyssines* (which common opinion with little probability, would haue to bee the Empire of *Prester Iohn*)': Nathanael Carpenter, *Geographie* (Oxford, 1625), p. 205. |
| Donald Lupton, *Emblems of Rarities* | 1636 | Not printed above. A direct copy of Sebastian Münster's *Cosmographia*, which is printed above at pp219–20: Donald Lupton, *Emblems of Rarities* (London, 1636), pp. 405–9 |
| Francisco a Iesu de Escalona, *Relacion del Viaje* | c.1639 | Not printed above. A short notice that Tartary has had Christian kings for a long time, 'one of whom is called John', who was converted to Christianity by the Franciscans and who, along with the King of Armenia, had provided military assistance to the Holy Land: Anastasius van den Wyngaert (ed.), *Sinica Franciscana* (Firenze, 1933), vol. 2, p. 243. No translation known. |
| Afonso Mendes, *Expeditionis Aethiopicae* | c.1640s | Not printed above. A Latin text which puts forward the familiar thesis that Prester John was a term falsely applied to Ethiopia because he was originally Asian: Afonso Mendes, *Expeditionis Aethiopicae*, Camillo Beccari (ed.), in *Rerum Aethiopicarum Scriptores Occidentales Inediti a Saeculo XVI ad XIX* (Rome, 1908), Book 1, Ch.4, vol. 8, pp. 49–59 |

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| John Ball, *A Friendly Triall* | 1640 | Not printed above. A mention of Saga Za Ab as an ambassador of Prester John: John Ball, *A Friendly Triall* (Cambridge, 1640), p. 184 |
| Richard Brome, *The antipodes: a comedy* | 1640 | Not printed above. One character in this play is made to exclaim of another character: 'He talks much of the Kingdome of *Cathaya*, Of one great *Caan*, and goodman *Prester Iohn*, (What e're they be) and sayes that *Caan's* a Clowne vnto the *Iohn* he speaks of. And that *Iohn* dwels up almost at Paradice: But sure his mind is in a wilder nesse: For there he sayes are Geese that have two heads a peece, and Hens that beare more wooll upon their backs than sheep': Richard Brome, *The antipodes: a comedy* (London, 1640), act 1, scene 3, p. 7 (from beginning of the play; the work is unpaginated). |
| James Howell, *Instructions for forreine travel* | 1642 | Not printed above. A short refutation of Scaliger's hypothesis, repudiating him for placing Prester John in Ethiopia, when 'it is certaine that he was an Asian, and King of Tenduc in Tartary above two thousand miles distant': James Howell, *Instructions for forreine travel* (London, 1642), pp. 153–4. |
| James Howell, *Epistolae* | 1650 | Not printed above. A letter containing a reiteration of Howell's poor opinion of Scaliger's hypothesis: James Howell, 'Letter IX to Doctor B'., in *Epistolae* (London, 1650), p. 14. |
| François Eudes de Mézeray, *Histoire de France* | 1651 | Not printed above. A short notice about Chingis Khan destroying the kingdom of Prester John: John Bulteel (trans.), *A general chronological history of France* (London, 1683), p. 302 |
| Peter Heylyn, *Cosmographie* | 1652 | Printed above from Peter Heylyn, *Cosmographie* (London, 1652), book 3, pp. 202–3; book 4, p. 70. The views expressed by Heylyn in this text are also repeated with less detail in his *Mikrokosmos* (London, 1625), pp. 669–70. |
| Lancelot Dawes, *Sermons* | 1653 | Not printed above. A sermon including the following: 'It is a good custome of the *Emperour* of the *Abyssenes (Prester John)* to have every meal, for the first dish, that comes on his table, a dead man's skull, to put him in mind of his mortality': Lancelot Dawes, *Sermons* (London, 1653), p. 132 |
| Michael Boim, *Letter* | 4 Nov. 1653 | Not printed above. Boim, a Sinologist, hypothesises that the Chinese were converted to Christianity not by St Thomas, but by the Christians of the kingdom of Prester John. The letter is preserved in Johannes Nieuhof, John Ogilby (trans.), *An embassy from the East-India Company* (London, 1673), pp. 325–8 [originally published in Dutch in 1665] |

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| Abraham Cowley, *Poems* | 1656 | Not printed above. Prester John is here referred to as the 'King of Goyome': Abraham Cowley, *Poems* (London, 1656), p. 64. |
| Johann Buxtorf, *The Jewish Synagogue* | 1657 | Not printed above. A passing mention of a 'Hebrew history of the kingdome of Prester John', attached to the end of a copy of Sebastian Munster's *Cosmographia*, presumably a reference to the Hebrew translation of the *Prester John Letter* (?): Johann Buxtorf, Mr A. of Q[ueen's] Col[lege, Oxford] (trans.), *The Jewish Synagogue* (London, 1657), p. 42 |
| Balthazar Téllez, *Historia de Etiopia a Alta ou Abassia* | 1660 | Printed above from Balthazar Téllez, *Historia de Etiopia*, [anonymous] (trans.), *The Travels of the Jesuits in Ethiopia* (London, 1710), ch.1, pp. 1–5. This text is an abridgment and revision of Manuel de Almeida's *Historia de Etiopia a Alta ou Abassia*, which was published posthumously in 1660 in an abridged and revised form by Téllez, who also collated information from other authors, as he says in his Preface. I have compared this to the English translation of de Almeida by C.F. Beckingham and G.W.B. Huntingford directly from the Portuguese of Almeida's original work which was never published: C.F. Beckingham and G.W.B. Huntingford, *Some Records of Ethiopia, 1593–1646* (London, 1954), pp. 3–7. Both contain roughly the same opinions. |
| William Johnson, *Novelty represt* | 1661 | Not printed above. A short reference to Pope Alexander III's letter to Prester John, interpreted here as to the Ethiopians: William Johnson, *Novelty represt* (Paris, 1661), p. 168. |
| Thomas Blount, *Glossographia* | 1661 | Not printed above. An early English dictionary, in which the word 'Abyssines' is defined as 'people of that part of *Aethiopia* which is subject to *Prester John*': Thomas Blount, *Glossographia* (London, 1661), [ordered alphabetically, not paginated]. |
| Manuel de Faria e Sousa, *Asia Portuguesa* | 1666 | Not printed above. The author associates Prester John with Ethiopia, but as an afterthought in describing Asia, he expresses the possibility that Prester John was actually Tibetan: Manuel de Faria e Sousa, *Asia Portuguesa*, John Stevens (trans.) *The Portugues Asia* (London, 1695), book 1, pt 3, ch.4, pp. 233–4; book 3, pt 4, ch.2, p. 338. Also contains accounts of the voyages of Pêro da Covilhã and Francisco Álvares. |
| Robert Fage, *Cosmography* | 1667 | Not printed above. A description of Ethiopian Christianity: Robert Fage, *Cosmography* (London, 1667), p. 105 |

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| Athanasius Kircher, *China Illustrata* | 1667 | Not printed above. A lengthy account following the standard argument that Prester John was an Asian monarch and not Ethiopian. His account makes reference to many contemporaries for proof. Of note is that Kircher denies the association between Prester John and China, and places him instead in Tibet and the desert regions of western China and Mongolia (i.e. Xīnjiāng, Jungaria, and the Gobi). The text was originally Latin, but I have only had access to: Athanasius Kircher, *China Illustrata*, John Ogilby (trans.), in Johannes Nieuhof, *An Embassy from the East-India Company* (London, 1673), pp. 341–8. |
| Jerónimo Lobo, *A Short Relation of the River Nile* | 1669 | Printed above from Jerónimo Lobo, Sir Peter Wyche (trans.), *A Short Relation of the River Nile* (London, 1669), pp. 1–2, 37–45. |
| Arnoldus Montanus, *Atlas Chinensis* | 1671 | Printed above from Arnoldus Montanus, *Atlas Chinensis*, John Ogilby (trans.) (London, 1671), p. 650. |
| Elias Ashmole, *The institution, laws & ceremonies of the most noble Order of the Garter* | 1672 | Not printed above. Ashmole writes that Prester John (emperor of Ethiopia) established the Knights of St Anthony in Ethiopia in the year 370: Elias Ashmole, *The institution, laws & ceremonies of the most noble order of the Garter* (London, 1672), p. 62. The same opinion can be found in John Logan, *Analogia Honorum* (London, 1677), p. 149; and Banjamine Smithurst, *Britain's Glory* (London 1689), p. 78 |
| Johannes Nieuhof, *Embassy from the East-India Company* | 1673 | Printed above from Johannes Nieuhof, John Ogilby (trans.), *Embassy from the East-India Company* (London, 1673), pp. 7, 10, 12. |
| Hiob Ludolf, *Aethiopian History* | 1681 | Printed above from Hiob Ludolf, *Historia Aethiopica*, J.P. Gent (trans.), *Aethiopian History* (London, 1682), pp. 151–5. (Note the typo in the pagination, which proceeds 151, 152, 153, 104, 105). |
| Dominique Bouhours, *The Life of St. Ignatius* | 1686 | Not printed above. Bouhours here argues that the Ethiopian attribution of the term Prester John is a 'popular error' because Prester John was 'a Title Anciently us'd by the Monarchs of the *Asian Tartars*': Dominique Bouhours, 'A Person of Quality' (trans.), *Life of St. Ignatius* (London, 1686), p. 307. |
| Philippe Avril, *The Dalaè-lama is the Famous Preste-Jean* | 1692 | Printed above from Philippe Avril, Char. Heron. (trans.), *Travels into Divers Parts of Europe and Asia* (London, 1693), pp. 154–64. |

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| Richard Ames, *The Jacobite Conventicle, a poem* | 1692 | Not printed above. Prester John appears in the following rhyme: 'All nations will be on us pissing, / And we become the scorn and hissing, / Of all the kingdoms which are known, / 'Twixt us and Land of Prester John': Richard Ames, *The Jacobite Conventicle* (London, 1692), p. 8. |
| John Ray, *A Collection of Curious Travels and Voyages* | 1693 | Not printed above. This text mentions Prester John sending griffins as gifts from Africa to the Persian sultan, and also an alliance between Persia and Prester John (presumably Ethiopia) against the Turks: John Ray, *A Collection of Curious Travels and Voyages* (London, 1693), pp. 187–8, 196. |
| Jodocus Crull, *The antient and present state of Muscovy ...* | 1698 | Not printed above. An almost verbatim copy of Philippe Avril's account of Prester John as the Dalai Lama except with a more pejorative approach to the 'idolatrous' Tibetans: Jodocus Crull, *The antient and present state of Muscovy* (London, 1698), pp. 65–8. |
| François Petit de la Croix, *Histoire de Genghizcan* | 1710 | Printed above from François Petit de la Croix, *Histoire de Genghizcan*, Penelope Aubin (trans.) (Calcutta, 1816), pp. 19–21. |
| Pierre Guarin (a.k.a. Paulus Guicius), *Chaldaica Grammatica* | 1726 | Not printed above. I have not had access to this text, but it is quoted in Gustav Oppert, *Der Presbyter Johannes in Sage und Geschichte* (Berlin, 1864), p. 10, n.3 as saying that Southern India is situated in Africa, 'hodie autem Abasini et Indiani appellantur, viventes sub potentissimo rege, quem vulgo presbyterum Johannem vocant, aut quod magis crediderim, presbyterum Cohan, quod tam Heb. quam Chald. sacerdotem sonat' [but now they are called Abyssinians and Indians, and live under a most powerful king whom they commonly call Prester John, but as I rather believe, Prester Cohan, which denotes 'priest' in both Hebrew and Syriac]. |
| Johann Lorenz von Mosheim, *An Ecclesiastical History* | 1741 | Printed above from Johann Lorenz von Mosheim, Archibald Maclaine (trans.), *An Ecclesiastical History* (London, 1765) pp. 554–6, 563. The original Latin adds a number of details: Mosheim, *Historia Tartarorum Ecclesiastica* (Helmstad, 1741), pp. 16–23. |
| Thomas Broughton, *An Historical Dictionary* | 1742 | Not printed above. Under Prester John, this dictionary notes: 'See Dalai-Lama': Thomas Broughton, *An Historical Dictionary* (London, 1742), p. 275. |

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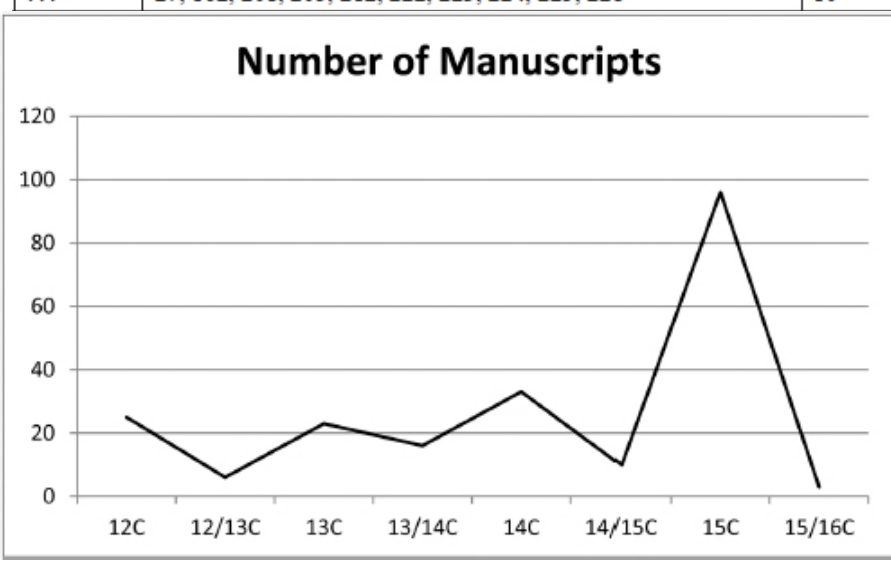
| Archibald Bower, *History of the Popes* | 1748 | Not printed above. Bower, in discussing Alexander III, includes an aside on Prester John, arguing that he was originally King of Tangut, called by its inhabitants Lassa [i.e. Lhasa]. He then proceeds to argue (following William of Tripoli, on whom see above footnote x on page y) that Prester John had invaded parts of East Asia, but was eventually defeated by the Tartars, whose daughter was then (following Marco Polo) married to Chingis Khan: Archibald Bower, *History of the Popes* (Dublin, 1748), pp. 152–3. |
| Remedius Prutký, *Travels* | 1752 | Printed above, with kind permission from the Hakluyt society, from J.H. Arrowsmith-Brown and R. Pankhurst (trans.), *Prutky's Travels in Ethiopia and Other Countries* (London, 1991), pp. 115–18. |
| Thomas Amory, *History of Mrs. Benlow* | 1755 | Not printed above. In a letter, one Mrs Benlow claims to have embarked upon travels passing through the land of Prester John: 'From Constantinople, I passed to the east, and from thence journeyed to the center of Afric, to see Prester John. This rout took up several years, and cost many thousand pounds': Thomas Amory, *Memoirs of Several Ladies of Great Britain* (London, 1755), p. 142. This is sadly the only female writer on this list, and one of only two women I know of before the twentieth century to mention Prester John (the second being a passing reference of little value in Charlotte Brontë's *The Professor*). |
| Voltaire, *Essai sur les Moeurs et l'Esprit des Nations* | 1756 | Printed above. Translation is my own, from M. Beuchot (ed.), *Oeuvres de Voltaire* (Paris, 1829), vol. 16 (vol. 2 of the *Essai*), pp. 219–20. |
| Joseph de Guignes, *Histoire Générale des Huns* | 1756–8 | Not printed above. De Guignes identifies Prester John with 'Ongkhan': Joseph De Guignes, *Histoire Générale des Huns* (Paris, 1756–8), vol. 3, p. 20. |
| Benito Jerónimo Feijóo y Montenegro, *Historical Reflexions* | Before 1764 | Printed above from Benito Jerónimo Feijóo y Montenegro, *Historical Reflexions*, John Brett (trans.), *Essays, or discourses, selected from the works of Feyjoo* (London, 1780), vol. 3, pp. 83–5. |
| *The Beauties of nature and art displayed ...* | 1763–4 | Not printed above. A stock standard modern account of Prester John as initially an Asian king erroneously transplanted to Ethiopia, informed chiefly by a reading of Balthazar Téllez, which is printed above at pp. 241–4: [anonymous], *The Beauties of nature and art* (London, 1763–4), vol. 13, pp. 120–1 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| George Sale, et al., *Universal History* | Before 1768 | Not printed above. A scholarly and sceptical account of Prester John concluding that he was Ung Khan (i.e. Toghrul): George Sale et al., *Universal History* (London, 1747–68), vol. 3, pp. 264, 367; vol. 4, pp. 332–3; especially vol. 15, pp. 27–32. |
| John Brown, *A General History of the Christian Church* | 1771 | Not printed above. In a chapter titled 'The History of the Twelfth Century' (pp. 264–5), Brown discusses Prester John (who he identifies as 'Ungkan'). He mentions his 'pompous missives … [which] made the credulous Greeks and Latins believe his empire to be astonishingly extensive, glorious, and happy'. He then mentions that his son or brother, King David, was later defeated and killed by Chingis Khan: John Brown, *A General History of the Christian Church* (Dublin, 1771), pp. 264–5. |
| Patrick Nisbet, *An Abridgement of Ecclesiastical History* | 1776 | Not printed above. Effectively a reiteration of the opinions of Johann Lorenz von Mosheim, for which see above at pp. 261–3: Patrick Nisbet, *An Abridgement of Ecclesiastical History* (Edinburgh, 1776), pp. 179–80. |
| George Lyttelton, *Essay* | 1776 | Not printed above. In a discussion of Abyssinia, Lyttelton writes: 'Solomon is said to have been the most magnificent as well as the wisest king that ever reigned; and yet how short did he fall of Prester John! for his throne was only guarded with twelve lions, and those but in effigy too; whereas this monarch, wisely disdaining a mere fictitious shew, has no less than threescore, all alive, and with claws and teeth that can be used upon occasion, as they that anger him often find to their cost': George Lyttelton, *The Works of George Lord Lyttelton* (London, 1776), p. 408. |
| Johann Gottlieb Georgi, *Russia* | 1780 | Printed above from Johann Gottlieb Georgi, *Russia* (London, 1780), pp. xciii-ciii. |
| Ephraim Chambers, *Cyclopaedia* | 1786–88 | Not printed above. Under 'Prester John', Chambers effectively reiterates Johann Lorenz von Mosheim, for which see above on pp.: Ephraim Chambers, *Cyclopaedia* (London, 1786–88), [arranged alphabetically without pagination]. |
| James Bruce, *Travels to Discover the Source of the Nile* | 1790 | Not printed above. Bruce, observing legal proceedings in Ethiopia, noted that 'These complaints [to the emperor], whether real or feigned, have always for their burden *Rete O Jan hoi!*, which, repeated quick, very much resembles Prete Jianni, the name that was given to this prince, of which we never knew the derivation': James Bruce, *Travels*, Samuel Shaw (ed.) (London, 1790), book 5, ch.11, vol. 3, p. 274. |

# Appendix 1 – Annotated List of Primary Sources

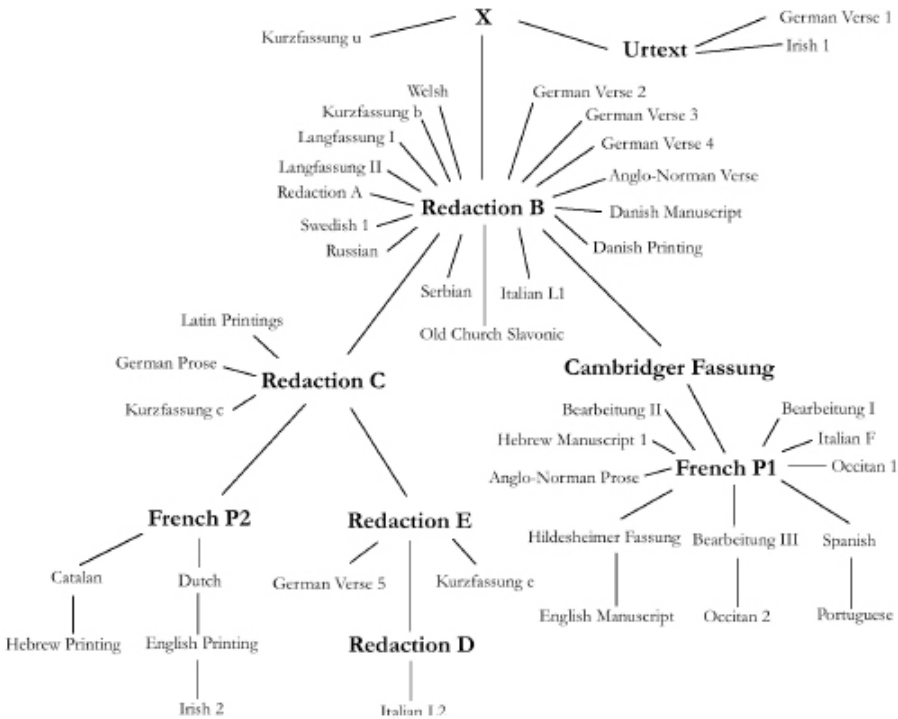
I have not included the great many (at least several hundred) sources, largely from the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries, that mention Prester John in association with Ethiopia and do not provide further comment. I have also not included the many passing references to Prester John as an authorial device in obscure poems, plays, sermons, and ecclesiastical texts, except where I have felt they added more information. I have also not included reference to authors who have simply repeated the opinions of a predecessor without further clarification. I have also left out a great many sources by eighteenth- and nineteenth-century orientalists who discussed Prester John, but did not add anything novel. In a few instances, I have not had access to the sources myself, but have learnt of them from the report of others; in these cases, I have noted where my reference has come from.

| Century | MSS. | Total |
|---|---|---|
| 12th | 1, 4, 15, 20, 42, 71, 92, 100, 105, 114, 119, 121, 123, 128, 133, 135, 147, 149, 156, 163, 164, 168, 183, 200, 214 | 25 |
| 12th/13th | 2, 39, 68, 126, 127, 204 | 6 |
| 13th | 3, 5, 24, 26, 56, 60, 73, 77, 78, 85, 87, 99, 107, 129, 132, 134, 148, 152, 158, 169, 182, 229, 230 | 23 |
| 13th/14th | 8, 16, 61, 63, 66, 69, 74, 75, 82, 150, 161, 167, 180, 181, 196, 211 | 16 |
| 14th | 12, 18, 23, 28, 32, 36, 38, 46, 47, 51, 62, 67, 70, 72, 84, 102, 104, 108, 110, 115, 118, 125, 144, 151, 153, 159, 170, 174, 175a, 185, 193, 203, 207 | 33 |
| 14th/15th | 7, 9, 43, 45, 64, 65, 103, 124, 139, 141 | 10 |
| 15th | 6, 10, 11, 13, 14, 17, 19, 22, 25, 29, 30, 31, 33, 34, 35, 37, 40a, 40b, 41, 44, 48, 49, 50, 52, 53, 54, 55, 57, 58, 59, 76, 79, 80, 81, 83, 86, 88, 89, 90, 91b, 93, 94, 95, 96, 97, 98, 101, 106, 111, 112, 113, 116, 117, 120, 122, 130, 131, 136, 137, 138, 140, 142, 143, 146, 154, 157, 165, 166, 171, 172, 173, 176, 177, 178, 179, 184, 186, 187, 188, 189, 190, 191, 192, 194, 195, 197, 198, 199, 202, 208, 210, 213, 217, 218, 220, 226, 227 | 97 |
| 15th/16th | 109, 145, 175b | 3 |
| 16th | 21, 155, 160 | 3 |
| 16th/17th | | 0 |
| 17th | 91a, 215a, 215b | 3 |
| 17th/18th | 216 | 1 |
| 18th | 206, 209 | 2 |
| 18th/19th | | 0 |
| 19th | 219, 221 | 2 |
| ??? | 27, 162, 201, 205, 212, 222, 223, 224, 225, 228 | 10 |



| Redaction | MSS. | Total |
|---|---|---|
| Urtext | 2, 3, 4, 8, 13, 15, 20, 32, 40b, 56, 59, 61, 70, 71, 80, 85, 91a, 93, 96, 107, 108, 112, 120, 126, 133, 150, 155, 161, 164, 167, 168, 178, 193, 194, 197, 198, 199, 201, 202, 206, 230 | 41 |
| Kurzfassung u | 100, 147, 149 | 3 |
| Redaction B | 1, 5, 9, 12, 16, 18, 21, 24, 25, 34, 38, 42, 43, 50, 53, 60, 63, 64, 65, 67, 68, 69, 72, 74, 75, 76, 77, 78, 82, 86, 92, 95, 103, 105, 113, 114, 115, 116, 117, 118, 119, 121, 123, 124, 127, 128, 129, 130, 132, 135, 137, 138, 139, 148, 151, 159, 163, 174, 175a, 177, 182, 183, 184, 185, 188, 189, 192, 203, 205, 215a, 215b, 221, 226 | 73 |
| Kurzfassung b | 41, 142, 152 | 3 |
| Redaction A | 7, 17, 23, 91b | 4 |
| Redaction C | 19, 31, 39, 40a, 46, 51, 55, 73, 79, 84, 87, 88, 90, 94, 98, 102, 110, 125, 139, 142, 154, 156, 158, 160, 166, 169, 180, 187, 195, 200, 204, 219 | 32 |
| Kurzfassung c | 111 | 1 |
| Redaction D | 6, 33, 37, 52, 54, 57, 62, 101, 109, 140, 145, 165, 170, 190, 191 | 15 |
| Redaction E | 66, 97, 104, 134, 141, 181, 196, 211, 220 | 9 |
| Kurzfassung e | 89 | 1 |
| Langfassung I | 47, 173 | 2 |
| Langfassung II | 22, 48, 81, 146, 186, 216 | 6 |
| Kurzfassung a | 10, 14 | 2 |
| Bearbeitung I | 136 | 1 |
| Cambridger Fassung | 28 | 1 |
| Bearbeitung II | 11 | 1 |
| Hildesheimer Fassung | 30, 36, 44, 45, 58, 122, 131, 157, 172, 175b, 176, 179, 209 | 13 |
| Bearbeitung III | 35, 144, 171 | 3 |
| ??? | 26, 27, 29, 49, 83, 99, 106, 153, 162, 207, 208, 210, 211, 212, 213, 214, 217, 218, 222, 223, 224, 225, 227, 228, 229 | 25 |

| Description | Manuscripts | Total |
|---|---|---|
| Epistola / Littera | 3, 10, 12, 14, 15, 17, 19, 21, 22, 23, 31, 32, 33, 34, 36, 38, 39, 40a, 40b, 44, 48, 55, 56, 58, 61, 64, 66, 70, 71, 72, 73, 74, 76, 77, 78, 81, 82, 83, 84, 85, 86, 90, 91b, 92, 94, 101, 102, 103, 105, 108, 111, 112, 113, 114, 115, 119, 122, 123, 124, 125, 128, 130, 131, 132, 134, 135, 136, 137, 138, 139, 140, 146, 148, 150, 156, 157, 159, 161, 164, 167, 168, 169, 171, 172, 173, 174, 175a, 176, 177, 179, 183, 187, 188, 189, 192, 195, 199, 200, 204b, 205, 217 | 101 |
| Descriptio (regionis Indie, de statu Presbiteri Johannis, etc.) | 24, 30, 32, 52, 85 | 5 |
| Historia | 30, 97, 101, 104, 141, 181, 196, 219 | 8 |
| Liber | 35, 43, 46, 97, 104, 181, 196, 219 | 8 |
| Cronica | 41 | 1 |
| Sermo | 51, 120 | 2 |
| Tractatus | 91a, 91b, 95, 185 | 4 |
| Libellus | 141 | 1 |
| Pseudepistola | 204a | 1 |
| Compendium | 176 | 1 |
| Not specified | 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 11, 13, 16, 18, 20, 25, 37, 42, 45, 47, 49, 50, 53, 54, 57, 59, 60, 62, 63, 65, 67, 68, 69, 75, 79, 80, 87, 88, 89, 93, 96, 98, 99, 100, 106, 107, 109, 110, 116, 117, 118, 121, 126, 127, 129, 133, 142, 143, 144, 145, 147, 149, 151, 152, 153, 154, 155, 158, 160, 162, 163, 165, 166, 170, 175b, 178, 180, 182, 184, 186, 190, 191, 193, 194, 197, 198 | 84 |
| ??? | 26, 27, 28, 29, 201, 202, 203, 206, 207, 208, 209, 210, 211, 212, 213, 214, 215, 216, 218, 219, 220, 221, 222, 223, 224, 225, 226, 227, 228, 229, 230 | 31 |




# Appendix 2 – The Manuscript Traditions of the Prester John Letter

**The Latin Manuscripts**

The standard edition of the Latin *Prester John Letter* was made by Zarncke in 1879; this has been reprinted and translated above.[1] Various printed editions existed before this but they were incomplete and took no account of the complex manuscript traditions.[2] Zarncke knew of 96 manuscripts but only made use of 74 for his edition. The following list provides shelfmarks of 234 copies of the Latin *Prester John Letter*. Zarncke identified five redactions, which he labelled A, B, C, D, and E, each of which added various details.

Remarkably, there has been no proper English translation of Zarncke's Latin edition of the *Prester John Letter* until now. All English translations known to me have been only partial and have dealt poorly with the interpolated material.[3]

In a comprehensive study published in 2000, Bettina Wagner re-

examined the work of Zarncke in light of the increased manuscript count. She knew of 207 manuscripts but only examined 200 in detail. Her work concluded that Zarncke's edition was valid but revised some of his claims about the manuscript traditions, and provided editions of newly discovered textual variants. Rather than Zarncke's divisions (Uninterpolated/Urtext, A, B, C, D and E), Wagner suggests the following scheme:

Tradition 1 (twelfth and thirteenth centuries):

Uninterpolated (urtext)
Kurzfassung u (an abbreviated version of the urtext)
Redaction A
Kurzfassung a (an abbreviated version of Redaction a)
Redaction B
Kurzfassung b (an abbreviated version of Redaction B)
Redaction C
Kurzfassung c (an abbreviated version of Redaction C)
Redaction D
Redaction E
Kurzfassung e (an abbreviated version of Redaction E)
Langfassung I (an expanded version based on Redaction B)
Langfassung II (an expanded version based on Redaction B)

Tradition 2 (fourteenth and fifteenth centuries):

Bearbeitung I
Cambridger Fassung[4]
Bearbeitung II
Hildesheimer Fassung[5]
Bearbeitung III

Translations were made from Tradition 1 into French, with alterations, and were then translated back into Latin, with more alterations, to form the various forms of Tradition 2. wagner has provided editions of many of these textual variants: Kurzfassung u, Langfassung i, Langfassung ii, Kurzfassung a, Bearbeitung i, the Cambridger Fassung, Bearbeitung ii, the Hildesheimer Fassung, and Bearbeitung III. These were insufficiently different from Zarncke's editions to warrant space in the present book.

The main manuscript lists can be found in wagner, *Die "Epistola presbiteri Johannis*," pp. 14–131, and Baum, *Verwandlungen,* pp. 353–63. Wagner also provided a list of 163 printed copies made in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, which has not been reproduced here.

Wagner's manuscript numbers and classification scheme have been preserved below. More details about the first 200 manuscripts can be found in her list. The manuscripts were arranged by Wagner by alphabetising their location and so all manuscripts newly discovered by myself have been given in a supplementary list (nos.201–33) in order to preserve Wagner's numeral designations for nos.1–200.

Manuscript references appear as follows:

City, Library, Manuscript Designation, Folio Numbers, Redaction, Date e.g. London, British Library, Add.10000, ff.1r-100v (Redaction B), 14th C.

**List of Latin Manuscripts**

- Aberystwyth, National Library of Wales, Peniarth MS 382 D, ff.43r–45r, (Redaction B), 12th C.
- Amiens, Bibliothèque Municipale, MS.226, ff.126r–128v (Urtext), 12th/13th C.
- Arras, Bibliothèque Municipale, MS.184, 121r–124v (Urtext), 13th C.
- Arras, Bibliothèque Municipale, MS.528, ff.152r–153r (Urtext), 12th C.
- Baltimore, Walters Art Gallery, MS.W.76, ff.53v–58r (Redaction B), 13th C.
- Barcelona, Biblioteca de Catalunya, MS.271, ff.26v–31r (Redaction D), 15th C.
- Beaune, Bibliothèque Municipale, MS.7, ff.201v–202r (Redaction A), 14th/15th C.
- Berlin, Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz, MS.Diez.B.Sant.16, ff.110v–112v (Urtext), 13th/14th C.
- Berlin, Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin – PreuBischer Kulturbesitz, MS.Magd.174, ff.27r–30v (Redaction B), 14th/15th C.
- Berlin, Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz, MS.Lat. fol.245, ff.8v–12r (Kurzfassung a), 15th C.
- Berlin, Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz, MS.Lat. qu.557, ff.126v–134r (Bearbeitung II), 15th C.
- Berlin, Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz, MS.theol.lat. fol.587, ff.92v–94r (Redaction B), 14th C.
- Berlin, Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz, MS.theol.lat. fol.635, f.141v (Urtext), 15th C.
- Berlin, Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz, MS.theol.lat. qu.141, ff.48v–52r (Kurzfassung a), 15th C.

- Bern, Burgerbibliothek, Cod.458, ff.103v–104v (Urtext), 12th C.
- Breslau (Wroclaw), Biblioteka Uniwesytecka, MS.IV F 33, ff.27v–30v, (Redaction B), 13th/14th C.
- Breslau (Wroclaw), Biblioteka Uniwersytecka, MS. V F 81, ff.205v–207r, (Redaction A), 15th C.
- Breslau (Wroclaw), Biblioteka Uniwersytecka, MS. III Q 1, ff.97v–100v, (Redaction B, text ends at §87), 14th C.
- Brussels, Bibliothèque Royale Albert I$^{er}$, MS.1160–63, ff.54r–61v (Redaction C, without §100), 15th C.
- Brussels, Bibliothèque Royale Albert I$^{er}$, MS.5541–42, f.121r (Urtext, §1–46 only), 12th C.
- Brussels, Bibliothèque Royale Albert I$^{er}$, MS. 18706–11, ff.247r–252v, (Redaction B), 16th C.
- Budapest, Eötvös Lóránd Tudományegyetem Könyvtár, Cod.Lat.71, ff.77r–78v (Langfassung II), 15th C.
- Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, Parker Library, MS.59, ff.28r–31v, (Redaction A, without §100), 14th C.
- Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, Parker Library, MS.66A, ff.127r–130r, (Redaction B), 13th C.
- Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, Parker Library, MS.275, ff.146r–149r, (Redaction B), 15th C.
- Cambridge, Emmanuel College, MS.27, ff.165v–167r (Redaction B), 13th C.
- Cambridge, Magdalene College, Pepys MS.2808, ff.129r-130v (Redaction B), 12th C.
- Cambridge, University Library, MS.Dd.3.16, ff.41r–44r (Cambridger Fassung), 14th C.
- Cambridge (Massacheusetts), Harvard College Library, MS. riant 88, ff.1r–8v, (Redaction C), 15th C.
- Cambridge (Massacheusetts), Harvard College Library, MS. riant 90, ff.62r–66r (Hildesheimer Fassung), 15th C.
- Darmstadt, Hessische Landes- und Hochschulbibliothek, HS.231, ff.91r–94r, (Redaction C), 15th C.
- Darmstadt, Hessische Landes- und Hochschulbibliothek, HS.1405, ff.23r–24v, (abbreviated Urtext), 14th C.
- Dresden, Sächsische Landesbibliothek, HS.F.61$^{a}$, ff.1r–5r (Redaction D), 15th C.
- Dublin, Trinity College, MS.448, ff.204v–209r (Redaction B), 15th C.
- Escorial, real Biblioteca de San Lorenzo, MS.L.I.27, ff.20r–36v (Bearbeitung III, without §6.v–96.vv), 15th C.
- Escorial, real Biblioteca de San Lorenzo, MS.L.III.22, ff.28r–35r (Hildesheimer Fassung), 14th C.
- Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Cod.plut.lat.89

sup.17, ff.90r–95r, (Redaction D), 15th C.
- Frankfurt am Main, Stadt- und Universitätsbibliothek, Ms.Barth.71, ff.141r–145v (Redaction B), 14th C.
- Fulda, Hessische Landesbibliothek, Hs. B.3, ff.99r–107r (Redaction C), 12th/13th C.
- [Two copies in one MS:] Gottingen, Niedersächsische Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek, 4º Cod. Ms. Hist. 61, pp. 255–62 (Redaction C), and pp. 302–7 (Urtext), 15th C.
- Göttweig, Stiftsbibliothek, Hs.472 (rot), 308 (schwarz), ff.72v–73v, (Kurzfassung b), 15th C.
- Graz, Universitätsbibliothek, Hs.433, ff.153r–156v (Redaction B), 12th C.
- Halberstadt, Dom-Gymnasium, Hs.86, ff.26r–32r (Redaction B), 14th/15th C.
- Hannover, Niedersächsische Landesbibliothek, Ms.IV 616, ff.241r–248v (Hildesheimer Fassung), 15th C.
- Hildesheim, Bibliothek des bischöflichen Gymnasium Josephinum, Nr. 17, (now Berlin, Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin – PreuBischer Kulturbesitz, MS.theol.lat.293), ff.113r–129v (Hildesheimer Fassung), 14th/15th C.
- Innsbruck, Universitätsbibliothek, Cod.355, ff.93v–99r (Redaction C), 14th C.
- Ithaca (New York), Cornell University Library, Ms. Bdd. Rare BX B51, ff.171v–172v (Langfassung I), 14th C.
- Karlsruhe, Badische Landesbibliothek, Hs. K 380, ff.204v–206v, (Langfassung II), 15th C.
- Kaschau (Košice), Biskupská knižnica, Cod. R.3.33, ff.306v–311r (???), 15th C.
- Klosterneuburg, Stiftsbibliothek, CCl 1099, ff.243r–248r (Redaction B), 15th C.
- Köln, Historisches Archiv der Stadt Koln, W 201 / W* 137, a.k.a. Cod.7020 137, ff.1r–10v (Redaction C), 14th C.
- Königsberg, Bibliotheca Regia et Universitatis, Cod.1282, ff.116r–120v, 122r–126r (Redaction D), 15th C.
- Krakau, Biblioteka Jagiellońska, Cod.431, ff.116r–119r (Redaction B), 15th C.
- Krakau, Biblioteka Jagiellońska, Cod.1607, ff.367r–374v (Redaction D), 15th C.
- Krakau, Muzeum Narodowe, Biblioteka Czartoryskich, Cod.1575, pp. 162–72 (Redaction C), 15th C.
- Kremsmünster, Stiftsbibliothek, CC 253, ff.147r–147v, 140r–140v (Urtext, without §42–3), 13th C.
- Leipzig, Universitätsbibliothek, Cod.855, ff.145v–152v (Redaction D), 15th C.

- Leipzig, Universitätsbibliothek, Cod.1008, ff.391r–392r, 412v (Hildesheimer Fassung), 15th C.
- Lille, Bibliothèque Municipale, Ms. 341, ff.21v–22v (Urtext), 15th C.
- London, British Library, Add.14252, ff.92r–97v (Redaction B), 13th C.
- London, British Library, Add.22349, ff.186r–190r (Urtext), 13th/14th C.
- London, British Library, Add.23930, ff.88r–91r (Redaction D), 14th C.
- London, British Library, Add.26770, ff.89v–92r (Redaction B), 13th/14th C.
- London, British Library, Add.34763, ff.83r–91r (Redaction B), 14th/15th C.
- London, British Library, Cotton Claudius B.VII, ff.207v–209r (Redaction B), 14th/15th C.
- London, British Library, Cotton Cleopatra C.X, ff.149r–156v (Redaction E), 13th/14th C.
- London, British Library, Cotton Domitian A.XIII, ff.130r–132r (Redaction B), 14th C.
- London, British Library, Cotton Titus A.XXVII, ff.182r–185v (Redaction B), 12th/13th C.
- London, British Library, Harley 215, ff.101r–106v (Redaction B), 13th/14th C.
- London, British Library, Harley 2667, ff.147r–149r (Urtext), 14th C.
- London, British Library, Harley 3099, ff.166r–167v (Urtext), 12th C.
- London, British Library, Harley 3185, ff.79r–90r (Redaction B), 14th C.
- London, British Library, Harley 3678, ff.95v–96v (Redaction C, §43 onwards), 13th C.
- London, British Library, Royal 12.C.VI, ff.40r–42r (Redaction B, missing §1–8), 13th/14th C.
- London, British Library, Royal 13.A.XIV, ff.272r–277v (Redaction B), 13th/14th C.
- London, British Library, Royal 13.E.X, ff.270r–271r (Redaction B), 15th C.
- London, Lambeth Palace Library, Ms.238, ff.186r–188v (Redaction B, without §100), 13th C.
- London, Lambeth Palace Library, Ms.371, ff.24r–26r (Redaction B, without §100), 13th C.
- Lüneburg, Ratsbücherei, Ms. Theol. 2º 11, ff.52r–53v (Redaction C), 15th C.

- Luzern, Zentralbibliothek, Hs. KB 25 fol., ff.105r–107r (Urtext, damaged), 15th C.
- Lyon, Bibliothèque Municipale, Ms.168, ff.10r–13v (Langfassung II), 15th C.
- Madrid, Biblioteca Nacional, Ms.9783 (Ee103), ff.79r–81v (Redaction B), 13th/14th C.
- Magdeburg, Dom-Gymnasium, Cod.129, ff.268v–270r (???), 15th C.
- Mailand, Biblioteca Ambrosiana, A.226 Inf., ff.49v–53r (Redaction C), 14th C.
- Mailand, Biblioteca Ambrosiana, P. 25 sup., ff.204v–206v (Urtext, with additions), 13th C.
- Mailand, Biblioteca Trivulziana, Cod. N. 774, ff.49r–53v (Redaction B), 15th C.
- Montpellier, Faculté de Médecine, Ms. H 384, ff.127r–127v (Redaction C, only up to §20), 13th C.
- München, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Cgm 317, ff.148v–152r (Redaction C), 15th C.
- München, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Cgm 2928, ff.37v–39v (Kurzfassung e, fragmentary), 15th C.
- München, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Clm 3254, ff.306r–310v (Redaction C), 15th C.
- [Two copies in one MS:] München, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Clm 4143, ff.53r–56r (Urtext), 17th C., and ff.87r–90r (Redaction A), 15th C.
- München, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Clm.5251, ff.199r–200r (Redaction B, from §78 onwards), 12th C.
- München, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Clm 7685, ff.115r–121v (Redaction A), 15th C.
- München, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Clm 8248, ff.87r–96v (Redaction C), 15th C.
- München, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Clm 8439, ff.156r–158r (Redaction B), 15th C.
- München, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Clm 8485, ff.63v–66v (Urtext), 15th C.
- München, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Clm 9503, ff.319r–327v (Redaction E), 15th C.
- München, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Clm 11726, ff.53r–58v (Redaction C), 15th C.
- München, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Clm 18953, f.62r (???, text fragmentary, §1–9 only), 13th C.
- München, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Clm 19411, f.9r (Kurzfassung u), 12th C.
- München, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Clm 19695, ff.194r–201r

(Redaction D, without §76–96aa), 15th C.
- München, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, ClmClm 21549, ff.329v–334r, (Redaction C), 14th C.
- München, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Clm 22377, ff.212r–214r, (Redaction B), 14th/15th C.
- München, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Clm 26800, ff.100r–130r, (Redaction E), 14th C.
- München, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Clm 30004, ff.1r–13r (Redaction B), 12th C.
- Münster, Universitätsbibliothek, ff.26–33 (???), 15th C.
- Nancy, Bibliothèque Municipale, Ms.1547, ff.109v–110v (Urtext, up to §71 only), 13th C.
- Neapel, Biblioteca Nazionale, Cod. Viennese lat.36, 58v–59v (Urtext), 14th C.
- Nikolsburg (Mikulov), Furstlich Dietrichsteinsche Bibliothek, II, 32, [now Prague, Národní Knihovna, VI.G.21], ff.??? (Redaction D), 15th/16th C.
- Olmütz (Olomouc), Státní Vědecká Knihovna, Cod. M.II.162, ff.334r–337v (Redaction C, up to §94), 14th C.
- Opladen, Archiv Fürstenberg-Stammheim, Hs. 27.28, pp. 241–3, (Kurzfassung c, fragmentary), 15th C.
- Orléans, Bibliothèque Municipale, Ms.262, ff.129r–133r (Urtext), 15th C.
- Oxford, Bodleian Library, Ms. Bodley 648, ff.13v–18v (Redaction B), 15th C.
- Oxford, Bodleian Library, Ms. Digby 158, ff.2r–5v (Redaction B, without §100), 12th C.
- Oxford, Bodleian Library, Ms. Digby 172, ff.124r–125v (Redaction B), 14th C.
- Oxford, Bodleian Library, Ms Holkham misc.28, ff.57r–59r (Redaction B), 15th C.
- Oxford, Bodleian Library, Ms. Rawlinson D.520, ff.7r–12r (Redaction B), 15th C.
- Oxford, Corpus Christi College, Ms.86, ff.91v–94v (Redaction B, without §100), 14th C.
- Oxford, Oriel College, Ms.2, ff.181r–183r (Redaction B, without §100), 12th C.
- Paderborn, Archiv des Paderborner Studienfonds (Erzbischöfliche Akademische Bibliothek), Hs. B$^{a}$ 11, ff.146r–147v (Urtext, up to §73 only), 15th C.
- Paris, Bibliotheque de l'Arsenal, Ms. 379, ff.34r–36r (Redaction B), 12th C.
- Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Ms. Lat.1616, ff.380r–384v, (Hildesheimer Fassung), 15th C.

- Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Ms. Lat.2342, ff.191r-193r, (Redaction B), 12th C.
- Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Ms. Lat.3195, ff.62r–63v, (Redaction B), 14th/15th C.
- Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Ms. Lat.3359, ff.143v–147r, (Redaction C), 14th C.
- Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Ms. Lat.3563, ff.147r–148v (Urtext), 12th/13th C.
- Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Ms. Lat.3803, ff.17v–18r, (Redaction B), 12th/13th C.
- Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Ms. Lat.3858A, ff.200v–202r, (Redaction B), 12th C.
- Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Ms. Lat.5941, ff.93r–93v, (Redaction B), 13th C.
- Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Ms. Lat.6225, ff.244v–248r, (Redaction B), 15th C.
- Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Ms. Lat.6244A, ff.124r–130v, (Hildesheimer Fassung), 15th C.
- Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Ms. Lat.16331, ff.178r–180v (Redaction B), 13th C.
- Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Ms. Lat.16730, f.280r (Urtext), 12th C.
- Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Ms. Lat.18324, pp. 331–41, (Redaction E, fragmentary), 13th C.
- Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Ms. Nouvelles Acquisitions Lat.310, ff.164v–167v (Redaction B, up to §78 only), 12th C.
- Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Ms. Nouvelles Acquisitions Lat.1112, ff.131r–136v (Bearbeitung I), 15th C.
- Pavia, Bibliotheca Universitaria, Aldini 415, ff.43r–51r (Redaction B), 15th C.
- Pelplin, Biblioteka Seminarium Duchownego, Ms.225 (307), ff.1r–4v, (Redaction B, from §13 onwards), 15th C.
- Philadelphia, Free Library, John F. Lewis Ms.1, ff.94v–99r (Mixture of Redactions B and C), 14th/15th C.
- Prague, Knihovna Metropolitní Kapituli, G. XXIX (1022), ff.123v–128v, (Redaction D), 15th C.
- Prague, Knihovna Metropolitní Kapituli, H.IX (1063), ff.154r–167r, (Redaction E), 14th/15th C.
- Prague, Národní Knihovna, Křižovnická Knihovna, VI.D.11, ff.11r–16v, (Redaction C), 15th C.
- Prague, Národní Knihovna, I.F.8 (240), ff.269v–270v (Kurzfassung b, fragmentary), 15th C.
- Prague, Národní Knihovna, VIII.D.1, ff.243v–244v (Bearbeitung

III, up to §17 only), 14th C. 145) Preßburg (Bratislava), Archív Hlavného Mesta, Ms.84, ff.203r–207r (Redaction D, up to §74 only), 15th/16th C.

- Ravenna, Biblioteca Comunale Classense, Ms.117, pp. 464–71, (Langfassung II), 15th C 147) Reims, Bibliotheque Municipale, Ms.142, ff.85v–86r (Kurzfassung u), 12th C.
- Rome, Biblioteca Casanatense, Ms.1083, ff.35v–37v (Redaction B), 13th C.
- Rouen, Bibliothèque Municipale, Ms.1343, ff.186r–186v (Kurzfassung u) 12th C.
- Saint-Omer, Bibliothèque Municipale, Ms.710, ff.105v–107r (Urtext), 13th/14th C.
- Salamanca, Biblioteca Universitaria, Ms.2238, ff.217r–219v (Redaction B), 14th C.
- St. Gallen, Stiftsbibliothek, Cod. Sangall.633, pp. 128–30 (Kurzfassung b, fragmentary), 13th C.
- Straßburg, Bibliothèque de la Ville, Ms.???, ff.??? (???), 14th C. (see Wagner, p. 105; Zarncke, *Abh.1,* p. 906)
- Straßburg, Bibliothèque de la Ville, Ms.B.53, ff.??? (Redaction C), 15th C.
- Stuttgart, Württembergische Landesbibliothek, Cod.Hist.2º 246, ff.216v–221r, (Urtext, damaged), 16th C.
- Stuttgart, Württembergische Landesbibliothek, Cod.Hist.2º 411, ff.180r–182v (Redaction C), 12th C.
- Stuttgart, Württembergische Landesbibliothek, HB.I.248, ff.97r–101r, (Hildesheimer Fassung), 15th C.
- Tournai, Bibliothèque Communale, Ville Cod.135, ff.35v–37r (Redaction C?), 13th C.
- Trier, Stadtbibliothek, Hs.523/56 8º, ff.19r–20v (Redaction B), 14th C.
- Trier, Stadtbibliothek, Hs.1374/140 4º, ff.217r–219v (Redaction C), 16th C.
- Troyes, Bibliothèque Municipale et Archives Anciennes, Ms.1876, ff.77r–81v, (Urtext), 13th/14th C.
- Valencia, Biblioteca de la Catedral / Biblioteca Universitaria (?), Ms.45, ff.???, (???), ??? C. (see Zarncke, *Abh.1,* p.906)
- Valenciennes, Bibliothèque Municipale, Ms.207, ff.107v–109v (Redaction B), 12th C.
- Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Cod.Ottob.Lat.1555, ff.131v–135r (Urtext), 12th C.
- Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Cod.Ottob.Lat.2807, ff.103r–107v (Redaction D), 15th C.
- Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Cod.Pal.Lat.1361, ff.1r–7r, (Redaction C), 15th C.

- Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Cod.Reg.Lat.657, ff.37v–43v, (Urtext), 13th/14th C.
- Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Cod.Reg.Lat.1658, ff.63r–65v, (Urtext), 12th C.
- Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Cod.Vat.Lat.1058, ff.121r–125v, (Redaction C), 13th C.
- Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Cod.Vat.Lat.4265, ff.230r–236r, (Redaction D), 14th C.
- Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Cod.Vat.Lat.7170, ff.1r–26r (Bearbeitung III), 15th C.
- Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Cod.Vat.Lat.7317, ff.374r–378r, (Hildesheimer Fassung), 15th C.
- Venice, Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, Lat.XI.80 (3057), ff.369r–372v, (Langfassung I), 15th C.
- Venice, Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, Lat.XIV.198 (4495), pp. 51–62, (Redaction B, up to §78 only), 14th C.
- [Two copies in one MS:] Venice, Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, Lat. XIV.264 (4296), ff.37v, 35r–35v, 38r (Redaction B), 14th C., ff.48v–52r (Hildesheimer Fassung), 15th/16th C.
- Vesoul, Bibliothèque Municipale, Ms.74, ff.118r–122r (Hildesheimer Fassung), 15th C.
- Vorau, Stiftsbibliothek, Cod.352 (LIII), ff.230r–234v (Redaction B), 15th C.
- Warschau, Biblioteka Narodowa, Ms.8052, ff.201r–202v (Urtext), 15th C.
- Wien, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Cod.322, ff.253r–257v (???), 15th C.
- Wien, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Cod.253, ff.102v–105v, (Redaction C), 13th/14th C.
- Wien, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Cod.413, ff.190r–196r, (Redaction E), 13th/14th C.
- Wien, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Cod.579, ff.34v–39v (Redaction B), 13th C.
- Wien, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Cod.951, ff.182v–187v, (Redaction B), 12th C.
- Wien, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Cod.2373, ff.159r–160v, (Redaction B), 15th C.
- Wien, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Cod.2511, ff.101v–105v, (Redaction B), 14th C.
- Wien, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Cod.3130, ff.163r–165v, (Langfassung II), 15th C.
- Wien, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Cod.12761, ff.1r–7r (Redaction C), 15th C.
- Wilhering, Stiftsbibliothek, Chl.IX.67, ff.7v–11v (Redaction B),

15th C.
- Windsheim, Stadtbibliothek, Cod.76, ff.198v–203r (Redaction B), 15th C.
- Wittingau (Třeboň), Státní Oblástní Archiv, Ms.A.7, ff.64r–74v (Redaction D), 15th C.
- Wittingau (Třeboň), Státní Oblástní Archiv, Ms.A.14, ff.9r–18v (Redaction D), 15th C.
- Wolfenbüttel, Herzog August Bibliothek, Cod.Guelf.205 Helmst. (238), ff.103r–104v (Redaction B, up to §78 only), 15th C.
- Wolfenbüttel, Herzog August Bibliothek, Cod.Guelf.643 Helmst., ff.211r–215r, (Urtext, fragmentary, free reworking), 14th C.
- Wolfenbüttel, Herzog August Bibliothek, Cod.Guelf.42.3 Aug.2º (2505), ff.292v–294v (Urtext), 15th C.
- Wolfenbüttel, Herzog August Bibliothek, Cod.Guelf.11 Aug.4º (3006), ff.205v–207v (Redaction C, up to §79 only), 15th C.
- Wolfenbüttel, Herzog August Bibliothek, Cod.Guelf.13.6 Aug.4º, ff.13r–14r, (Redaction E, fragmentary), 13th/14th C.
- Würzburg, Universitätsbibliothek, M.ch.f.38, ff.299v–301v (Urtext, up to §98 only), 15th C.
- Würzburg, Universitätsbibliothek, M.ch.f.39, ff.32r–34v (Urtext), 15th C.
- Zürich, Zentralbibliothek, C 101, ff.64r–67r (Urtext), 15th C.
- Zwettl, Stiftsbibliothek, Cod.Zwetl.299, ff.278r–282r (Redaction C), 12th C.

**Additional Manuscripts:**

- Berlin, Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Ms.Diez.C.quart.63, ff.24r–27r (Urtext), ??? C.
- Brussels, Bibliothèque de Bourgogne, Ms.3142, ff.55r–62r (Urtext?), 15th C.
- Cambridge, University Library (?), Ms.3235 (Oo.7.48), ff.13r–16r (Redaction B), 14th C
- Fulda, Landesbibliothek (?), Ms.G.11, f.1r–??? (Redaction C), 12th/13th C.
- Genoa, Biblioteca Universitaria, Ms.A.III.2, ff.278r–281r (Redaction B?), ??? C.
- Göttingen, Niedersächsische Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek, 2o Cod. Ms.Hist.808, ff.1r–4r (Urtext), 18th C.
- Klosterneuberg, Cod.Claustroneoburgensis 323, ff.1a–7b (???), 14th C.
- Königsberg, ???, Cod.334, ff.??? (???), 15th C
- Mailand, Biblioteca Ambrosiana, H.162 Inf., ff.58r–65r

(Hildesheimer Fassung, up to §66 only), 18th C.
- Melk, Stiftsbibliothek, Cod.1094 (formerly 424.H.42), ff.238r–248v, (???), 15th C.
- München, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Clm 265, ff.1r–??? (Redaction E), 13th/14th C.
- München, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Clm 18767, ff.??? (???), ??? C.
- Oxford, Bodleian Library, Cod.2291 (?), ff.13–??? (???), 15th C.
- Paris, Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, Cod.579A, ff.34r–??? (???), 12th C.
- [Two copies in one MS:] Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Ms.Lat.12116, ff.88r–90v (Redaction B), 17th C., ff.91r–94r, (Redaction B), 17th C.
- Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Collection Moreau, Ms.842, ff.38r–40v (Langfassung II), 17th/18th C.
- Rome, Biblioteca Vallicelliana, F 49/1–2, ff.196v-202v (???), 15th C.
- Schlierbach, Stiftsbibliothek, Cod.37, ff.52r-57v (???), 15th C.
- Straßburg, Bibliothèque Nationale et Universitaire, Ms.3876, ff.113r-???, (Redaction C), 19th C.
- Stuttgart, Württembergische Landesbibliothek, Cod.theol.et phil.2º 100, ff.345v-353v (Redaction E), 15th C. (Wagner has this as MS.156a)
- Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Cod.Vat.Lat.9537, ff.288r–???, (Redaction B), 19th C.
- Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Ms.Vat.reg.Suec.157, ff.???, (???), ??? C.
- Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Ms.Vat.reg.Suec.171, ff.???, (???), ??? C.
- Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Ms.Vat.reg.Suec.987, ff.???, (???), ??? C.
- Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Ms.Vat.Reg.Suec.1195, ff.???, (???), ??? C.
- Venice, S. Michele (?), Cod.1130, ff.??? (Redaction B), 15th C.
- Wien, Dominikanerkloster, Cod.Dominicanorum Vindobonensis 43, ff.???, (???), 15th C.
- Wien, Osterreichische Nationalbibliothek, Cod.1490, ff.142r–??? (???), ??? C.
- Wien, Schottenstift, Cod.231, ff.156v–157r (???), 13th C.
- Willanow, ???, Ms.???, ff.??? (Urtext), 13th C. (see Baum)

Total: 232

(nos.40, 91, 175 and 215 have two copies each)

## Latin Manuscripts by Date

[Numbers which are followed by ‘a’ or ‘b’ refer to those manuscripts which contain two copies of the Letter.]

The fifteenth-century spike in popularity can, I believe, be accounted for by the increasing interest in Prester John in Portugal, as well as increased contact with Ethiopia, with which Prester John was firmly associated by this time. As well as this, manuscript numbers tend to spike in the fifteenth century for many texts due to demographics and increased demand for education. The subsequent decline is, of course, associated with the introduction of printing.

## Latin Manuscripts by Redaction

## The Letter’s Genre according to the Manuscripts

## Translations

**French** Gosman has provided an edition of the French version of the *Letter* based on the 23 known manuscripts.[6] The French text is divided into two versions: P1 (19 MSS.), translated from Latin Redaction B, and P2 (4 MSS.), translated from Redaction C. As we have it, the French versions date from the thirteenth century but they may be based on twelfth-century exemplars. István Bejczy provides the details for 12 printed versions, one of which has been reproduced in facsimile and translated into English by Vsevolod slessarev.[7]

**Anglo-Norman** Three Anglo-Norman manuscripts are known. The first two contain a verse translation made in the late twelfth century; an edition of this was made by Vitale in 1975.[8] The two manuscripts of this Anglo-Norman rhymed version add a 57-line prologue to the *Letter* and both add epilogues, though the epilogues differ widely between the two manuscripts. This rhymed version was based on the Redaction B of the Latin tradition. The third Anglo-Norman manuscript is a thirteenth century prose translation unrelated to the rhymed version, made from the P1 group of French manuscripts.[9]

**Occitan** Two manuscripts containing Occitan versions are known. The first belongs to the P1 French tradition. The second manuscript is fragmentary and was translated directly from the Latin of Bearbeitung III. Both were edited by Gosman.[10]

**Italian** Seven Italian manuscripts are known.[11] One manuscript (Italian L1) derives from Latin Redaction B. A second manuscript (Italian L2)

derives from Latin Redaction D. Bendinelli has edited both of these.[12] The other 12 manuscripts (Italian F) draw from the P1 French tradition. No definitive edition of the latter has thus far appeared. See the many works by Bartolucci provided in the bibliography to the present work.

**Catalan** One Catalan manuscript is known. The Catalan translation was made in the fifteenth century based on the French P2 tradition. It has been edited by Cornagliotti.[13]

**Spanish & Portuguese** A Spanish version, based on the French P1 group, appeared in 1515 in Pseudo-Gomez de Santisteban's *Libro del Infante Dom Pedro de Portugal*. This was reproduced 59 times in Spanish and 52 times in Portuguese between 1515 and 1902. The oldest Portuguese edition dates to 1602. A full study, as well as an English translation from the Spanish, has been made by Rogers.[14]

**German** Three German versions were edited by Zarncke.[15] They were all based directly on the Latin traditions. The first (Germ.1) derives from the Latin Urtext. The second (Germ.2) derives from Redaction B. The third, which is that found in Albrecht von Scharfenburg's *Jüngerer Titurel* (Germ.3), derives from Redaction B, with some influences from Redactions C and E. This survives in 11 manuscripts. The fourth (Germ.4) derives from Redaction B. The fifth (Germ.5) rests on Redaction E. Wagner added to this one prose version unknown to Zarncke.[16] This (Germ.P.) derives from Redaction C.

**Dutch** One Dutch printed version was made around 1506. It was based on the French P2 tradition. An edition has been made by Bejczy.[17]

**English** One English manuscript dated to the fifteenth century is known, which was translated from the Latin Hildesheimer Fassung. It was edited by Zarncke in 1878.[18] An English printed version appeared around 1510, based on the 1506 Dutch printing. This has also been edited.[19]

**Irish** Two manuscripts are known. The first is a fifteenth century translation from the Latin Urtext. This manuscript, which ends imperfectly, was edited by Greene in 1952.[20] A missing folio was later found by MacNiocaill.[21] The second manuscript is a sixteenth-century translation from the English printed version. This was also edited by Greene.

**Welsh** Two manuscripts are known, all based on Latin Redaction B. The earliest exemplar (from 1346) has been edited with parallel Latin.[22] One other version has been edited.[23]

**Danish** One Danish manuscript (c.1500) and one printed edition (1510) are extant. Both were edited, with facing Latin, by Karker.[24] Both were made independently from Latin Redaction B.

**Swedish** Six Swedish copies are extant. The first was made c.1450 and has been edited by Karker.[25] The second has not been edited: stockholm,

Kungliga Biblioteket, D.27, ff.???, 16th C. The first derives from Latin Redaction B; the second is of unknown derivation. A third manuscript (stockholm, Kungliga Biblioteket, D.4, ff.???, 15th C.) lists the *Letter* in its table of contents but the folios containing the *Letter* have been lost.[26]

**Old Church Slavonic** Old Church slavonic are known, dating from the fifteenth to nineteenth centuries, however there is evidence to suggest that there were Old Church slavonic versions as early as the thirteenth century.[27] These were made from Latin Redaction B.

**Russian** A known number of Russian manuscripts form a group translated from Redaction B. One example from a seventeenth century manuscript was edited by Speranskii.[28] Another Russian manuscript was edited by Prokhorov.[29] A proper study remains to be done on the Russian manuscripts.

**Serbian** One Serbian manuscript of the fifteenth century, derived from Redaction B has been edited by Istrin.[30]

**Hebrew** Two manuscripts and one printed version have been edited with facing translation by Ullendorff and Beckingham.[31] The first manuscript, dated to 1271, is based on the French P1 group. The second manuscript, dated to 1442, is based on the Italian text. The printed version, made in Constantinople in 1519, is related to the Catalan version.

**Syriac** There are no known copies of the *Letter* written in Syriac. The Syriac version discussed and 'translated' by Olu Oguibe is in fact a fictional invention, which I confirmed in private communications with Professor Oguibe.[32]

**Total number of vernacular manuscripts: At least 235**

**Total number of manuscripts, both Latin and vernacular: At least 469**

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1 Zarncke, *Abh.1*, pp. 872–908.

2 For editions prior to Zarncke's, see Zarncke, *Abh.1*, pp. 872–1.

3 E. Denison Ross, "Prester John and the Empire of Ethiopia", in Arthur P. Newton, (ed.), *Travel and Travellers of the Middle Ages* (New York, 1926), pp. 174–94, here pp. 174–8; Sabine Baring-Gould, *Curious Myths of the Middle Ages* (London, 1876; reprinted 1977), pp. 29–32; Baring-Gould's translation is also reprinted in Hamilton Wright Mabie, *Legends that Every Child Should Know* (London, 1906), pp. 144–7; Robert Silverburg, *The Realm of Prester John* (New York, 1972) pp. 41–6, which was reprinted in Nicholas Jubber, *The Prester Quest* (London, 2005), pp. 524–9; George Boas, *Essays on Primitivism and Related Ideas in the Middle Ages* (Baltimore, 1948), pp. 161–4, which was reprinted in Gregory Claeys and Lyman T. Sargent (eds), *The Utopia Reader* (New York, 1999); the best English translations to appear thus far, though they still do not take account of the interpolated material, are those

of Michael Uebel, *Ecstatic Transformation* (New York, 2005), pp. 155–60; and Malcolm Barber and Keith Bate, *Letters from the East* (Farnham, 2010), pp. 62–8.

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[6] Martin Gosman, *La Lettre du Prêtre Jean* (Gröningen, 1982), pp. 50–504

[7] István Bejczy, *La Lettre du Prêtre Jean* (Paris, 2001), p. 195; Vsevolod Slessarev, *Prester John: the Letter and the Legend* (Minneapolis, 1959), pp. 67–79 and insert

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[10] Gosman, *La Lettre du Prêtre Jean*, pp. 505–34

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[31] Edward Ullendorff, and Charles F. Beckingham (eds and trans.), *The Hebrew Letters of Prester John* (Oxford, 1982); see also Steven Kaplan, "A Note on the Hebrew Letters of Prester John", *Journal of Jewish Studies*, vol. 36, no.1 (Spring, 1985), pp. 230–34

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# Appendix 3 – Prester John in Maps

Since Prester John was for the most part accepted as a geographical reality, either as monarch of an Asian or Ethiopian kingdom, then it is hardly surprising that he appears in a great number of maps made from the fourteenth through to the eighteenth centuries.[1] In these maps, he was most commonly mentioned as a passing reference to Ethiopia, but he was also sometimes placed in Asia. The earliest map known to contain Prester John is Giovanni da Carignano's map of c.1310. Although this is no longer extant, having been destroyed in the Second World War, it is known that da Carignano placed him in Ethiopia.[2] Most maps that referred to Prester John presented him summarily in Ethiopia, including Angelino Dulcert's map of 1336, the world map of the Venetian Albertin de Virga (made between 1411 and 1415), the 1436 world map of Andrea Bianco, the Catalan-Estense world map of the 1450s, Giovanni Leardo's map of 1452, Fra Mauro's 1459 map, Vesconte Maggiolo's 1512 map of the Atlantic, Sebastian Minister's 1540 map of Africa, Diogo Homem's map of East Africa that formed part of the atlas he made for Queen Mary of England in 1558, and which contains probably the most famous image of Prester John sitting atop an ornate throne, Abraham Ortelius' 1573 map titled *Presbiteri Iohannis, sive Abissinorvm Descriptio* (which inspired Johannes Blaeu's 1640 *Aethiopia Superior vel Interior vulgo Abissinorum sive Presbiterio Ioannis Imperium*, which itself inspired Robert Walton's 1659 map *New, Plaine & ExactMapp of Africa*), Heinrich Bunting's 1581 map of Africa, the 1596 map of Africa by Jan Huygen van Linschoten, the 1606 map *Abissinorum sive Prestiosi Ioannis Imperium* made by Gerardus Mercator and Jodocus Hondius, which became the archetype for many later maps including the 1628 *Abissinorum sive Pretiosi Ioannis Imperium* by Pieter van den Keere (a.k.a. Petrus Kaerius), Johannes Cloppenburg's 1630 *Abissinorum sive Pretiosi Joannis Imperium,* Johannes Janssonius' 1646 *Aethiopia Superior vel Interior vulgo Abissinorum sive Presbiteriioannis Imperium*, Matthaus Merian's c.1650 *Aethiopia Superior vel Interior vulgo Abissinorum sive Presbiteri Ioannis Imperium*, and Pieter van der Aa's 1714 *Atlas Souvage.* These maps contributed little to the understanding of the legend of Prester John, except to say that their makers understood him to be associated with Ethiopia.

Other maps, however, added more information. The controversial Vinland map of the early fifteenth century also presented John in Ethiopia, but with the following addendum: 'Prestls Johannis. Iste sunt terre populose ad meridiem prope sinum australem posite sed diuersorum ydiomatum in unum deum et in dominum ihm xpm credunt ecclesias habent in quibus orare possunt dicunt[ur]' ['Prester John. These are populous lands to the south, situated next to the southern bay. Although [they are] of various denominations, they believe in one God and in the lord Jesus Christ. They have churches in which they can pray, it is said'].[3] In 1375, Abraham Cresques added a large illustration of Prester John to his Catalan Atlas, accompanied by a paragraph of text that reads: 'A quest rey de Núbia està en guerra e armes [ab los] chrestians de Núbia qui són so[ts] la senyoria del enperador de Etiopia e de la terra de Preste Johan'.[4]

Although the vast majority of maps placed him in Ethiopia, he was sometimes represented in his traditional Asian location. The earliest surviving map containing Prester John placed him in Asia next to the legendary tribes of Gog and Magog. This is Pietro Vesconte's map of c.1320 which was attached to Marino Sanudo Toresello's *Liber Secretorum Fidelium Crucis*. In 1448/9, Andreas Walsperger placed him in the Far East, next to the Tigris, one of the rivers flowing from the terrestrial paradise. He was also placed in the Far East near the terrestrial paradise in the fifteenth-century Borgia world map. The 1475 world map contained in the anonymous *Rudimentum Noviciorum* printed by Brandis in Lübeck has him on an island in the Far East next to Babylon, India, and the terrestrial paradise. The late fifteenth-century Aslake world map likewise placed him just east of the Holy Land.[5]

Prester John's location was clearly a matter of some controversy, a theme that runs through the maps and many of the textual sources printed in the present work. In the map attached to Ranulph of Higden's *Polychronicon,* Prester John was placed in two locations: Scythia and Europe. In his 1507 *Universalis Cosmographia*, Martin Waldseemüller placed him in the Far East. But when Lorenz Fries came to revise Waldseemüller's maps in 1522, he felt it appropriate to relocate Prester John to Africa. Amazingly, the maker of the 1457 Genoese world map seems to have included Prester John in both Africa and Asia. In Asia, one may read the following text next to a line of mountains: 'Has turres construxit presbyter Johannes rex, ne [a] inclusis hominibus ad eum pateat accessus' ['King Prester John constructed these towers so that the enclosed nations would not be able to have access to him'], to some extent conflating Prester John with the Alexander legend.[6] But in Ethiopia, one reads the words *Indorum Rex* ('King of the Indians'), a title commonly used for Prester

John.[7] The exact implications of the Genoese mapmaker's attitudes are unclear.

Prester John's appearance in such a vast number of maps suggests that he was widely accepted as a real geographical entity from the fourteenth through to the seventeenth century, and sometimes even into the eighteenth, as in Pieter van der Aa's *Atlas Souvage.* Of course, the Prester John legend was not the only cartographic legend prevalent in the medieval and early modern periods, as anyone who has examined such maps will be well aware. A great many legendary geographical phenomena permeate the maps of this period, including the terrestrial paradise, the walls that Alexander the Great built to enclose the satanic nations of Gog and Magog, and monsters like the *cynocephali* (dog-headed men) or the *blemmyae* (headless men with their faces on their torsos) which were believed to inhabit the marginal spaces of the world. Sometimes, historians who do not specialise in the medieval period are prone to argue that medieval world maps were 'largely shaped by their theological message', rather than representing what the mapmakers thought the world actually contained.[8] This problematic viewpoint implies that medieval mapmakers knew the true nature of the world beyond Europe, but were actively misrepresenting it to fuel some sort of malevolent religious worldview. A comparison between maps and the textual sources that discussed the outside world reveals the prevalence of medieval views about the world's marvels, and the extent to which they were an accepted feature of medieval conceptions of the world. Likewise, a comparison between maps and geographical texts, such as those presented above, makes it abundantly clear that Prester John was thought of as a real feature of the geography of Asia and/or Africa .

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1 I have been unable to make use of the following thesis on this subject, which presumably adds much more information than this meagre appendix: Richard O. Galliers, *The Cartography of a Legend: Prester John of the Indies* (University of Michigan, M.A. Thesis, 1970).

2 Charles Beckingham, 'An Ethiopian Embassy to Europe, c.1310', *Journal of Semitic Studies,* vol. 14, (1989), pp. 337–46; reprinted in *PJMTLT,* pp. 197–206, here p. 339 (original pagination).

3 R.A. Skelton, Thomas E. Marston and George D, Painter (eds), *The Vinland Map and the Tartar Relation* (London, 1965), p. 131.

4 Georges Grosjean (ed.), *Mapamundi: the Catalan Atlas of the year 1375* (Zurich, 1978), Plate 4b and p. 78.

5 Peter M. Barber and Michelle P. Brown, 'The Aslake World Map', *Imago Mundi*, vol. 44, no.1 (1992), pp. 24–44.

6 Ivar Hallberg, *L'Extrême Orient dans la literature et la cartographie de l'Occident desXIII$^{e}$, XIV$^{e}$, et XV$^{e}$ siecles* (Göteborg, 1907), p. 283.

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# Abbreviations

Baum, *Verwandlungen*
: Baum, w., *Der Verwandlungen des Mythos vom Reich des Priesterkönigs Johannes* (Klagenfurt, 1999)

CCCM
: *Corpus Christianorum, Continuatio Mediaevalis*

MGH, SS.
: *Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Scriptores*

MGH, SS., RGUS
: *Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Scriptores, Rerum Germanicarum in Usum Scholarum*

PJMTLT
: Beckingham, C.F. and Hamilton, B. (eds), *Prester John, the Mongols and the Ten Lost Tribes* (aldershot, Variorum, 1996)

PL
: *Patrologia Latina*

RHC
: *Receuil des Historiens des Croisades*

RHGF
: *Receuil des historiens des Gaules et de la France*

RS
: Rolls Series

Zarncke, *Abh.1*
: Zarncke, F., *Der Priester Johannes, Erste Abhandlung*, vol. 7 of the *Abhandlungen der philologischhistorischen Classe der*

*Königlich Sächsischen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften* (Leipzig, Hirzel, 1879), reprinted in 1980 by georg Ulms Verlag together with the *Zweite Abhandlung* as Zarncke, *Der Priester Johannes: 2 Teile in 1 Band.*

Zarncke, *Abh.2*

Zarncke, F., *Der Priester Johannes, Zweite Abhandlung*, vol. 8 of the *Abhandlungen der philologisch-historischen Classe der Königlich Sächsischen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften* (Leipzig, Hirzel, 1876), reprinted in 1980 by georg Ulms Verlag together with the Erste abhandlung as Zarncke, *Der Priester Johannes: 2 Teile in 1 Band.*

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